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Fr. d'Alzon
Day by Day
(Part I - January - June)

Quotations from his writings

Compiled and edited by Fr. Jean Paul Périer-Muzet, A.A.

Rome, 2006

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Translation Team: Fr. John Franck, AA, chair; Frs. Thomas O'Brien, A.A., Oliver Blanchette, A.A., Joseph Fredette, A.A., Philip Bonvouloir, A.A., Claude Grenache, A.A., Donat Lamothe, A.A., Richard Lamoureux, A.A., Norman Meiklejohn, A.A., Br. Paul Henry, A.A.

Set-up and technical assistance: Loredana Giannetti

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Portrait of Fr. d'Alzon,

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Cum permissu Superiorum

□

*In memory of the Assumptionists and
Oblates of the Assumption who have worked
on the dissemination of their Founder's writings,
who have studied and explained the riches of his thought,
and who have made his name and his work known over time
and across continents.* □

Preface

This book is intended neither for scholars, nor for bed-time reading. It is more like a travelling companion, the kind of book that would have pleased Emmanuel d'Alzon, the founder of the Assumptionists, as well as of the Oblate missionaries of the Assumption, to whom the book is dedicated.

Emmanuel d'Alzon was not a systematic theologian. He was before all else a founder of religious Congregations, a pastor, a master of the spiritual life. What he wrote (sermons, conferences, thousands of letters, spiritual essays, popular articles and serious essays) was always intended to address events in the life of the Church and 19th century society, as well as the needs of his brothers and sisters in religious life. The purpose of Emmanuel d'Alzon Day by Day is to accompany the reader along the path of his or her own spiritual journey.

This book is organized according to the calendar and cycle of the liturgy. Father d'Alzon had many interests: he was taken up with a wide variety of human experiences. Consequently, in this book you will find excerpts from his writings that touch upon spiritual and theological themes, as well as reflections on simple but important human realities, like rest and relaxation, vacation, play, friendship, reading, work, education, family and social life, art and sports. The one who selected the texts wants to help the reader enter more profoundly into the celebrations of the liturgical year and to live more fully the events that a person lives through during the year.

The book leaves us with a certain image of Father d'Alzon, the image of a wise friend, of a man of faith yet a person that is profoundly human, a person one would like to have as a travelling companion. Even if it is not a systematic study of the through of the man, the book also provides a number of references that help the reader go further if time allows additional reading. Even when these texts deal with religious life and the specifically religious concerns that were Emmanuel d'Alzon's preoccupation, they were chosen particularly in view of the lay reader who will appreciate his faith perspective.

We are once again grateful to Father Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, the archivist and historian of the Assumptionists, who chose these texts very carefully and has provided enlightening introductions. His competence as a historian is well known, but we appreciate his pedagogical competence at least as much as his scholarly abilities. In the end, what will enable this book to make Father d'Alzon better known to more people is the love that Father Jean-Paul has for this spiritual master and for the spirit that he bequeathed to the Church and his religious families.

Fr. Richard E. Lamoureux, A.A.

Superior General

Foreword

The idea of offering our lay friends and those close to the Assumption a selection of d'Alzonian texts is not new, even though it has received renewed expression here and there in recent times. Assumptionists and Oblates in the provinces of Chile, Brazil-Argentina, Europe, North America, Africa-Madagascar and the region of Mexico, among others, have been concerned for a long time with finding ways to nourish those with whom we have the privilege of frequent contact in the Assumption and who have collaborated apostolically with our different religious families in services as varied as vocations, parochial and social pastoral work, teaching,

different kinds of chaplaincies, pilgrimages and the media. It is anchored in the conviction that was both original and dear to Fr. d'Alzon, that the laity, far from forming a body of auxiliaries, whether volunteers or full-time helpers, constitute a fully-fledged face of the Church, the People of God, and a communion in which each member, according to his or her own character and life choice, is called to testify with others to the living strength of the Gospel because it is the same Spirit who gathers them together.

To promote a more effective, more efficient and better defined collaboration between the religious world of the Assumption and our lay friends, to encourage each of them to share the spirit, spirituality or charism of the Assumption more and to bring to the mission field a mutual support that will endure....here is some of wealth of ideas, oral and written, which have emerged and which cannot simply remain at the level of "good intentions." Our predecessors knew this well, as they organised the Fraternities and Hospitalities, who in their turn developed magazines of spirituality on the Augustinian movement for them and for members of different Third Orders. These same religious, from their communities and local works, strove to organise strong battalions of benefactors, of zealous followers and partners, to use the terminology of the time.

To nourish a person's reflection, to fortify the faith and to energise the apostolate, it is essential to return to the sources constantly. Fr. Athanase Sage had received a mandate while publishing the Essential d'Alzon (Ecrits spirituels) in 1956, but this seminal Assumptionist classic hardly left the shelves of many religious. Fr. Rafael le Gleuher mobilised the young novices of his day to prepare a selection of spiritual reflections of the Founder; these consisted of short quotes on theological and religious themes that expressed the spirituality of Fr. d'Alzon. This work did not have a great deal of success and it was largely produced for religious. Since then the Essential d'Alzon and the whole correspondence of Fr. d'Alzon (between 1923 and 2003) were gradually entered into a computer data bank that now contains all known d'Alzonian texts; this allows much greater access to and selection of the thoughts and quotes that Fr. d'Alzon produced for the world of the laity. We not only entrust this new edition to the wisdom of the laity but especially to their prayer, persuaded as we are, that they will know how to draw from this common fund of the Assumption what is useful for them, neither feeling that they are being assimilated into religious life nor that their choice of life excludes them from a written source or commentary that, without fail, leads them to the living Gospel, the original seedbed and horizon where we encounter all our brothers and sisters.

THE

MONTH

OF

JANUARY

Our meetings with Fr. d'Alzon this month are based, on the one hand, on the liturgical calendar (1, 6, 18, 21, 24, 25, 28, 31), and, on the other, on fundamental themes of the Assumptionist charism, bringing to light the thought of the founder and the tradition to which it eventually gave life. For each quotation, an effort is made to provide the source of the text, the various Biblical passages cited by d'Alzon, whether implicit or explicit, and, at times, a word of explanation or interpretation to contextualize the quotation or to clarify d'Alzon's thought by giving some of the background or ramifications.

January 1

Mary, Mother of God

In the beginning God said: *Let us make man in our image and likeness* (Gen 1: 26). Without doubt, this did not just mean the first Adam, but also the second. Yet, after Jesus Christ, to which creature can these words be applied more perfectly than to Mary? Yes, she is the most perfect image of God, after his adorable Son... There is something about God that is inexpressible, and the eternal difference between the Creator and the creature is that the creator is Being in himself and at the same time the fullness of being, while the creature draws all his being from God alone. This illustrates the vastness of the abyss that exists between God and us. However, it is possible to say that in his love God does all that he can to bridge the gap. Indeed, God is the first among beings and has made Mary the mother and the principle of the humanity of his Son. How incredible and wonderful!

Ah! Without doubt, everything comes from God; but what treasures of life, what abundance of being must not have been communicated to Mary to enable her to become the Mother of God! As image of God, she has the strength, the perfection, the brilliance, and the beauty of being. The truth took possession of her....

Meditations on Religious Perfection

Paris, 1925, I, p.350

The Feast of Mary, the Mother of God, in the Roman calendar.

January 2

The Identity and Charism of the Assumption

Our spiritual life, our religious substance, our *raison d'être* as Augustinians of the Assumption is to be found in our motto:
*Adveniat
Regnum Tuum.*

The coming of reign of God in our souls, by the practice of the Christian virtues and the evangelical counsels, in keeping with our vocation; the coming of the reign of God in the world in the struggle against Satan and the conquest of souls, ransomed by Our Lord and yet still buried in the depths of error and sin; what could be more simple! What could be more ordinary, dare I say, than this form of the love of God! If, to this basic love, you add the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Blessed Virgin his Mother and the love of the Church his bride, you have before you in its briefest expression the spirit of the Assumption.

Instruction of 1868,

from the Essential d'Alzon (ES 130-131)

Adveniat Regnum Tuum: the second petition taken from the Lord's Prayer, according to Mt 6:10 & Lk 11:2b, that Fr. d'Alzon chose as the motto for the Assumption. Throughout their lives all the baptized are called to practice the Christian virtues; the evangelical counsels are, according to theological tradition, but not exclusively, bound more especially to the choice of religious life.

January 3

God's light

As I study religion, I discover, in the depths of Catholic dogma, such a great wealth, such a rich vein, a life so powerful... that it seems to me that the only way to strengthen flagging spirits or heal the moral fatigue that everyone laments today is to expose society to the brilliant light that guides all people coming into this world,¹ to warm them all with the rays of the Eternal Word.... The most intimate thought of my soul is that the world needs to be penetrated through and through with a Christian idea; otherwise it will fall apart.

Letter to Alphonse of Vignamont

March 18, 1835

(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 64)

¹ An implicit reference to the Prologue of John 1:9. The divine illumination of the human intelligence, heart and will forms one of the recurring leitmotifs of Augustinian thought: God, the light source of spirits, hearts and impulses. The first work of the Christian is, therefore, the care of the heart through the understanding and the goal of Christian life as union with God.

January 4

Go to Christ in total love

Yes, we go to Jesus Christ. We affirm Jesus Christ before those who deny him, or hate him, or abandon him. The denial of the unbeliever, the hatred of the impious, the neglect of the indifferent or the traitor are for us so many reasons for embracing Jesus Christ with a love that is more ardent, more active, more tender and demonstrated more solemnly. In Him we love God. And, although unworthy, we proclaim his divinity. We love the man, who is the most perfect of models and the most tender of friends. We love the God-Man, who brings peace to heaven and earth, the doctor of true law, *finis legis Christus*.¹ He initiates us into the supernatural world; by washing us in his blood, he transports us by his power and his mercy to those higher spheres which no one any longer wants today, because they are the true domain of the Sovereign whom no one wants today either, precisely because of his gifts. Yes, we love him because he leads us to true light and true goodness; we love him with a first-time love... with the love that made the apostle say: “

If anyone does not love Jesus Christ, let him be cursed

”...²

Instruction of 1868, from the Essential d'Alzon (ES, p. 133)

¹ Quotation from Rom 10:4 ... "*Christ is the end of the law.*"

² An approximate quotation of I Cor. 16:22. The mystical life is guided by the power of the call of love; it is a union of a person and his God. God comes to the soul and the soul in its turn is transported to God. The two dwell one in the other. In this way, the experience of God also becomes one of a love of human beings.

January 5

To pray with perseverance in the Spirit of Love,

which is none other than God

You must continue knocking at the door and it will be opened to you.¹ When God loves a soul as much as yours, the soul must expect to give something in return for so precious a gift. Everything that you necessarily endure purifies you, if you bear it with humility, in love. It is not necessary for you to understand what is happening to you; it is probably better that you don't understand any of the reasons and that you give yourself completely to Our Lord who loves you

and wants you to have faith in his love. Always remind yourselves of the words of the Holy Spirit: *In charitate perpetua dilexi te.*² Since God loves you, it is necessary for you to love him even if you do not feel it. With regard to this article of faith, I can only urge to you to persevere continually. Read the Gospel for Rogation Monday; you will see there that God loves the one who pesters him. The Gospel last Sunday is equally beautiful:

Petite et accipietis, ut gaudium vestrum sit plenum

. Abandon yourselves to this petition in the name of Jesus Christ. He adds:

Usque modo non petistis quid quam in nomine meo

.³ This is all admirable in my eyes and touches the bottom of my heart.

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus

May 30, 1848

(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 424)

¹ A Biblical reference to Mt 7:7c.

² Jer 31:3: *'I have loved you with an everlasting love'*.

³ Jn 16:24b: *'Ask and you will receive, so that your joy will be complete'* and Jn 16:24a: *'until now you have never asked for anything in my name'*

January 6

The star of Epiphany

It seems to me that you are right when, finding it impossible to receive the support you need, you turn to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. For this is where you will find your true support. Go to him; cry out to him so that it is to Him that you have recourse in the abandonment in which you find yourself. The mystery of the Epiphany provides you with an important lesson. See: the Magi are alone in their Orient and a star appears to them and guides them. They arrive in Jerusalem where they discover the necessary directions. The star hides and then reappears to show them the dwelling-place of the God Child.

May it be the same for you. When a guide seems wanting, invoke the light of Our Lord. If he Himself sends you help, take advantage of it.

Letter to Mrs. de Chaponay,

January 7, 1875

(Letters, vol. XV, p. 269)

¹ The feast of the Epiphany in the Roman calendar. The Gospel according to Matthew, ch. 2.

January 7

The Tradition of lay-religious collaboration

at the Assumption

There will be two classes of Associates: those who live here in the college, and those who live outside the premises, including those of you who are married. Both categories must live up to the ideals of Religious Life, as far as their circumstances permit. They must regard themselves as Religious living outside the cloister – wearing no distinctive uniform, yet distinctive by their manner of living – not being ordinary “good citizens”, but maintaining a high standard of virtue.

Those of our Associates who live in the world must realise to what dangers their piety is exposed by continual contact with worldly attitudes. In his prayer after the Last Supper, Our Lord prayed, not for the world, but for those he was going to leave in the world (Jn 17:9). Thence their need to be very humble and mistrust their own strength. The snares into which they are liable to fall must teach them to beware of themselves when they stand alone – but to have limitless confidence in God, with whose help there is nothing they cannot achieve, because his help will always suffice (II Cor. 12,9) – in God to whose goodness they must be ever grateful for their help they derive from the company of their brethren. As the Holy Spirit assures us in Pr 18, 19: *frater qui adjuvatur a fratre quasi civitas firma* (“When brother helps brother, theirs is the strength of a fortress” Vulgate version).

Rule of the Association of teachers of the collège of Nîmes,

December 27, 1845,

The Essential d'Alzon (ES, p. 1284 - 1285)

The term *alliance* is preferred to *collaboration* today in speaking of possible lay-religious ties.

January 8

Live the faith boldly

My third piece of advice invites you to slough off a certain prudence which is too often the refuge of a shameful laziness. "Prudent" sometimes means faint-hearted. Now more than ever is the time to repeat Bossuet's saying: *'Faith is daring'*. Therefore, let us have the boldness of faith, even if some may call it foolhardiness. Real prudence is the queen of the moral virtues; and a queen commands, acts, and, if necessary, fights. Some have transformed prudence into a frightened, old lady. Such prudence wears slippers and a nightdress; it is sick with cold and coughs a lot. I want nothing to do with this conventional prudence. You must not heed such prudence. As far as I am concerned, I always want to entrust myself madly to God's providence, lest, abandoned by all, I end up dying in a hospital!

Instruction of 1873,

from the Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 189-190)

At the Assumption, according to the teaching and example of Fr. d'Alzon, we greatly value the triple character of a bold, generous and selfless apostolate. It is a trait present in its origins, its goals and its accomplishments. In this quote Fr. d'Alzon stigmatizes the caricature of a (distorted) prudence, the conventional social one, but not the evangelical virtue of wisdom that knows how to put into practice the energies of the intelligence, the will and the heart.

January 9

The sunshine of the charity's Love,

the basis of friendship

See how it takes shape, grows, develops and produces its fruit. Charity can be compared to some magnificent tree. God the Holy Spirit plants it where he will. He drops its seed into that fertile ground which is the human heart. It lies there – then if the soil is well prepared, it begins to appear on the surface. But the hand of God is still there. With due respect for human autonomy and free will, the love of God caresses the newly born plant like the rays of the sun caress the flowers in our garden. It begins to take shape – it begins to grow. God's influence becomes more effective, the more we listen to His voice... and it is thus, as Saint Paul writes to the Romans (5:5) that *Charitas Dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per Spiritum sanctum qui datus est nobis* (“the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us”).

Thirteenth Meditation,

from the Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 412)

¹ This comparison of love-charity, of divine impulse and origin, is implicitly an evangelical inspiration in the writings of Fr. d'Alzon with reference to the parables of the sower and the grain of wheat: e.g. Mt 13:18... As for friendship, Fr. d'Alzon offers a magnificent definition attributed to Leibniz: *'the joy that one tastes in the happiness of others'* (Letters, vol. XIV, p. 374).

January 10

The Prayer of imitation in the union with God

Lord, I wish to imitate you. I wish to transform my earthly life into a heavenly life on Earth. How can I bring this about other than by imitating you better and better, day by day? The Gospel affords me so many examples. It would be blasphemous to pretend that I could do better than you. If I wish to become a saint, all I have to do is follow your example as best I can.

At the Last Supper you washed your Apostles' feet. It was to sanctify their lives with the final touch of complete purity -you could say to them as you gave them Holy Communion: *Jam vos mundi estis*

("Now you are clean"). But you had this to add:

Exemplum dedi vobis, ut quemadmodum ego feci, ita et vos faciatis

("I have given you an example because I wish you to do the same as I have just done"). It was

an example of humility and an example of charity. What more impressive example could you have left to the genuine Christian? "Learn to humble yourselves and learn to love."

Sixteenth Meditation

from the Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 452-453)

The doctrine of imitation of which one of the most famous written works is the *Imitation of Christ*, greatly inspired the prayer and life of Fr. d'Alzon. Its source was the evangelical precept of Christ:

You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect

(Mt 5:47c). This path of holiness is offered to all the baptised. It takes as its model the exemplary life of Christ with his disciples.

January 11

Social involvement in the Assumption

Evangelizare pauperibus misit me ("He sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor" Lk 4:18; Is 61:1). Such was the program Jesus Christ drew up for himself – and to reassure John the Baptist in prison, he gave as proof of his mission that the poor were having the Gospel preached to them (*pauperes evangelizantur* Lk 7:22). Very well, we must evangelize the poor all over again, beginning from "square one." We must look after them – we must see to all their needs in advance. If there is one sign of hope for the future, it is the devoted care with which the poor are being served by a number of priests, religious and valiant layfolk. Charitable organizations are rapidly spreading. We have the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul (the S.V.P.) – the Association of Saint François Regis and that of Saint François de Sales. We have working men's circles, youth clubs, industrial federations... who could name them all? And though no single one of these admirable initiatives would be powerful enough by itself to save France from ruin, banded together they form an Army-Corps of no mean proportions. They may appear humble and insignificant as they assemble in their parish halls and back-street back rooms – but they are united in a common bond of fraternal charity – and one day, despite their ragged and amateurish origins, they will emerge as a formidable force to be reckoned with by those who would snatch Christ from the hearts of His brethren.

We must look after our working people. We must look after the abandoned. We must go forth to meet them. We must preach the God they have come to ignore. We must show them the path of peace and reconciliation. We must teach them the positive value of human suffering.

Do this, and see how, little by little, faith is restored to warped minds and peace to broken hearts. These are not lost souls – just souls who have got lost. Win them over to Christ, and watch His Church triumph over the whole world. Amen.

Eighteenth Meditation

from the Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 470-471)

January 12

The Kingdom of God in all things, everywhere

It seems important to me to remind you, in a more positive way, that our life is built upon a broad vision which must nourish our common life and serve as a bond to bring together all our various efforts.

Our motto, *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*, gives us this main idea. We want to cooperate as much as we can in any effort to extend the reign of the three persons of the Holy Trinity. In this way, we will combat the three great errors of modern times. We want to help bring about: 1° The reign of God the Father. His existence is denied as well as his sovereign dominion over all creation; 2° The reign of God the Son. We must defend his reign of revealed truth; 3° the reign of the Holy Spirit. We must defend the supernatural world of holiness. The Reign of God the Father in the universe, reign of God the Son in the Church, reign of God the Holy Spirit in souls; this must be, it seems to me, the chief aim of the family of the Assumption.

Third Letter to Master of Novices

from the Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 160-162)

This text was a particular inspiration for Fr. Edgar Bourque (1921-1995) who came up with an exercise entitled "A D'Alzonian Examination of the Kingdom or Path for the Reign of God," consisting of three phases: an examination of the Kingdom of Christ from the Scripture, a personal examination of this growth of the Kingdom in our individual lives, and finally a time of praise, decision-making and forgiveness in prayer.

January 13

The Doctrinal character of the Assumption

"By studying the dominant ideas which governed our beginnings, you will advance in the perfection to which you are called." [*This invitation of Fr. d'Alzon in the preface of the Directory demonstrates the vigor with which he called his communities and all the baptized to a love of study and to a sustained doctrinal penetration of the Gospel message; these calls to study are quite unambiguous.*]

Study is indispensable for a religious who does not work with his hands. It is the means of earning his livelihood by the sweat of his brow. Those who don't work damn themselves.¹

Although study is not our only means of salvation, let be understood that if ever religious stop studying, it will be a sign that the Congregation has outlived its usefulness and has been cursed by God. Study is a penance, an atonement, a safeguard... It is not sufficient simply to study; we must have a goal. For us, everything must be related to God, to Jesus Christ, and to his Church. ²

Fourth Circular,

from the Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 208-209)

¹ One also finds an equally strong expression in Saint Paul: *'If anyone does not want to work, then he should not eat'* II Thes 3:10,
which shows a parallel concern, one for the life of the body and the other for the life of the spirit.

² The doctrinal character of the Assumption has been summarized in a fortuitous way in a formulation of the Capitular Rules of 1964: *'The Assumption, with all the weight of its origin and its history, tends strongly towards doctrinal, social and ecumenical works, with a preferential accent being placed on the concern for doctrine'* (n^o 186).

January 14

The Word of God is the first source

of inspiration

We derive our Mystical Theology from the same sources as our Dogmatic, though not in the same manner – first and foremost from the Bible.¹ It is the surest guarantee of its authenticity that our spiritual life should be based fairly and squarely upon God's written word. So let us make a serious study of Scripture and become thoroughly acquainted with it.

Saint Augustine has left us two directives if we are to draw the maximum benefit from studying our Bible. Here they are: 1) Some passages of the Bible are transparently clear, others veiled in deep obscurity. God gave us the former so that every Christian who reads the Bible should find therein precise rules of conduct. He gave us the latter for pastors and professors to explore its hidden treasures, there to find the solution to difficult problems and thence to pit their sagacity against the cunning of our adversaries..... 2) The Holy Spirit wished to endow the Scriptures with every shade of meaning it can bear.

Course in mystical theology,

from the Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 854)

¹ This now generally recognized truth, reiterated in the 20th century by the Second Vatican Council, did not escape the different commentators on the writings of Fr. d'Alzon, even if it would need once again to undergo a complete re-examination with reference to all his implicit and explicit references to Scripture.

January 15

The ground of Christian life: prayer, fasting and sharing

We needed financial resources to support our budding working-class enterprises. We also need prayer to appease God's anger.¹ Expiation by prayer on the one hand, expiation by constructive almsgiving on the other – such was the twofold aim of what we set out to do, two kinds of expiation blended into one – such was the twofold thought which presided over the foundation of “Notre Dame de Salut” (Our Lady of Salvation)! The Association organized public prayer on a grand scale, so necessary for France's rehabilitation, and reinvigorated a host of works that had languished because of a lack of funds. It has given birth to pilgrimages, which we had at the back of our mind from the very beginning. These have touched the very heart of God and have obliged the Mother of our Saviour to renew her miracles. And these public professions of Faith, which we were told no longer corresponded to the modern mentality, have now become not only popular but fashionable.² This, then, my Brothers, is only a very sketchy outline of what you have accomplished, of the works in which, for five years, you have more or less directly been involved. You haven't done all that had to be done – far from it. But your involvement, slight as it may have been, has been more than sufficient to reveal your intentions, establish your line of action, and show the world what kind of men you are.

Instruction of 1873,

from the Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 179)

¹ This expression in which d'Alzon does not mince words is, however, clearly Biblical: Ex 32: 10 or Nm: 11:1, as one is wont to find in the language of atonement, purification, and the offering of sacrifices. The practical means used, which are recalled here under the name of various generic works, are necessarily shaped by the mentality of the epoch.

² An allusion to a statement by Adolf Thiers, president of France (1871-1873), in the French Chamber, which was quickly refuted by the facts.

January 16

Love for the Pope in the Assumption

Who will our guide be? The Pope. It can be said that, since Philip the Fair,¹ politics has consisted in a massive conspiracy against the papacy. Kings wanted no Pope; today no one wants kings. Where is this hatred of monarchy leading us? But what difference does it make? Someone must rule, but must this "someone" wear a crown? When the sons of Jacob asked for a king, God considered it an insult.² No need to labour the point, but why deny it? If one thing is clear, it is that the tide of democracy is ever rising and is thick with revolution. Who knows

what minor incident will set the storm off? As for me, I consider the Church and what she has done in the past --- and I wait. There is no need for excessive despondency or for exaggerated optimism. The essential is to place all our trust in Our Blessed Lord, in Our Lady and in the Church, and to keep working. All the rest does not matter. But I am mistaken. Who can say that our efforts will not bring joy, as long as we proceed intelligently.

Instruction of 1868,

from the Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 143)

¹ The Gallican tradition was based on the policy of centralizing monarchical power in this sovereign (1268-1314); in fact, it strongly opposed what popular opinion considered to be the practice of papal interference in state affairs, at a time when the Church was involved in the State and the State in the Church. The French Revolution, which was firstly antimonarchical, then anticlerical, and even antireligious, gave rise to this Providentialist reading of history, which Bossuet exemplified in his day.

² One tradition can be found in I Sam 8.

January 17

The privileged place of the liturgical prayer of the Church

When I recite the Office [*the prayer of the Breviary or Liturgy of the Hours*], I should make my own all the intentions of the Church, that Communion of Saints discharging its obligation to God and asking for the perseverance of the just and the conversion of sinners. The Church itself prays only in the name of Jesus Christ, whose prayer it continues on the earth, just as the great High-priest unceasingly offers the prayers of the Church to God his Father, at whose right hand he sits. I pray in union with Christ and if, indeed, I am united to the Divine Mediator between God and man, my prayer will be heard.

The Directory, III, 16, "The Divine Office"

January 17 is the feast of Saint Anthony of the desert, the father of monks. Monastic prayer, from its origins, always gave a privileged place to chanting the prayer of the psalms in their entirety, in one week or in one month, depending on the era; this tradition gradually passed into the structured organization of the Office.

The Second Vatican Council renewed the structure of the Liturgy of the Hours and strongly recommended the practice to all the baptised.

January 18

The Beginning of the week of prayer

for Christian Unity¹

God seems to be manifesting his will. Our little brotherhood has now been given a precise task: that of reconciling the Oriental Churches. So it is to be the fight against schism² and this calls for deep humility and glowing charity, because we are up against that spirit of pride and contention which tore the seamless robe of Christ.³ In our love for unity we must practice absolute obedience to him whom Christ appointed head of his Church. To accomplish our task we will have to study the oriental languages – their rules and rites, their religious history, not to mention their theology properly so called.

It is now urgent for me to practice a further degree of poverty by selling my estates as soon as I can.

I am asking Our Lord to set the seal of his approval on this enterprise by giving Mademoiselle

Correnson a religious vocation.

Diary note dated December 22, 1863

in his Personal Reflections,

The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 826-827)

¹ The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity began in 1908 as the Octave of Christian Unity, and focused on prayer for church unity. The dates of the week were proposed by Fr. Paul Wattson, cofounder of the Graymoor Franciscan Friars. He conceived of the week beginning on the Feast of the Confession of Peter, the Protestant variant of the ancient Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter, on 18 January, and concluding with the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul on 25 January.

² The characteristic designation in Catholic circles of the rift between the Oriental Catholic Churches and the Orthodox tradition. In the 21st century, one speaks of separated Churches or, better yet, Sister Churches.

³ An image originating from the Scriptural narrative in Jn 19:23.

January 19

To focus on the essential, the love of Our Lord

You know that when Our Lord entrusted the Church to Saint Peter, he asked him only this question: *Diligis me plus his.*¹ What is essential is that you love Our Lord greatly and everything that he loved, the Blessed Virgin and the Church. Love Our Saviour with all your soul, so that every Mass you celebrate adds another degree of love to your heart. It is of the priest that it is especially said:

disposuit

Ascensiones in corde suo

² It is before Our Lord that you must soften the harshness of your character; it is under his gaze that you perform all your actions; it is from Him that you must constantly ask for advice. Your studies must even take on a completely new character with a faith which will lead you look for supernatural light in all human knowledge.

A Letter to Fr. Picard for his ordination,

June 5, 1856

(Letters, vol. II, p. 93)

¹ Jn 21:15: '*Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?*'

² Ps 84:6 (Vulgate): *'Happy the man whom you strengthen to make the ascent to you'*. At times it has happened that some have set at odds, but in an artificial enough way, especially since the 17th

century in France, the Christocentric understanding of modern spirituality (in which Fr. d'Alzon was steeped) and the Theocentric or Trinitarian understanding of the great Oriental theological tradition. Moreover, some have facilely superimposed on this distinction the concrete psychological understanding of modern spirituality with regard to the one of the Fathers which is ontological and abstract. These distinctions have little foundation. Christ is at the centre of the Trinity, as he is in the history of salvation and of Redemption. Dichotomies are often the work of the theological schools, leading to real impoverishment or spiritual distortions.

January 20

The Eucharist, the strength of God in our lives

If I really love Our Lord I will seek him, above all, in the Sacrament of his Love. He is there as the object and the model of my adoration – and it is there that I will acquire the strength of persuasion in order to get others to come and adore him too.... Think of the power which lies in the hands and the heart of a priest. Day by day he summons down to the altar this Divine Victim offered up since the world began. Think of that confided to a religious. By fervent Communion and voluntary self-sacrifice he identifies himself with Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Why are we not making better use of the power and authority God has given us?

The century which has witnessed the foundation of our religious family is a century in revolt. We are worshipping Man and denying God his rights. The Church has counter-acted this deplorable tendency by making it the Century of Our Blessed Lady and the Century of the Blessed Sacrament.¹ With the same end in view I have taken for my motto: "Thy Kingdom Come"! To proclaim the rights of God and the Kingship of Christ in the Holy Eucharist – to enhance Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, to love the liturgy, to encourage Forty Hours and outdoor processions – in other words, to develop every possible aspect and reminder of Jesus'

Sovereignty and Jesus' triumph through the Holy Eucharist – such has become my mission.

Meditation on the Eucharist,

from the Essential d'Alzon

(ES p. 949, 952)

¹ In 1854 Pius IX proclaimed the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception. The 19th century was a century of Marian manifestations with the apparitions at the Rue du Bac (1830), La Salette (1846) and Lourdes (1858). This century also saw the development of numerous Eucharistic devotions: Forty Hours, Perpetual Adoration, and International Eucharistic Congresses.

January 21

Saint Agnes

No one can say that because one is young one is less of a saint. The day before yesterday, it was the feast of Saint Agnes, a virgin, martyred at the age of twelve. It is a great feast day in Rome. In the Piazza Navona where I went to celebrate Mass for Miss Agnès Veuillot, I saw the place where she was protected by an angel against ignoble attacks. In the evening, I went to Saint Agnes Outside the Walls, where her body lies in rest. Here you see the honour that the Church shows this little girl, because she was so full of energy. Oh! If only the great had half of this energy! In your place, I will make a novena to Saint Agnes so that you may be able to imitate her in her virginal integrity. By the way, God deliver us from the chicken-hearted, even if they are roosters!¹

Letter to the Children of Mary of the Assumption in Nîmes,

January 23, 1870

(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 142-143)

¹ The expression “poule mouillée” in French means a coward (as in the English phrase be “chicken-hearted”). Here we see a little bit of Fr. d'Alzon's wit. He was in Rome at this time for the First Vatican Council. He makes the analogy between wet hens (poules mouillées) and wet roosters (coqs mouillés); ‘wet roosters’ referred to members of the hierarchy of the First Vatican Council whose sluggish ways d'Alzon found unbearable.

January 22

Catholics all of one piece

First of all, we must recognize this first trait of our Institute: simplicity of means. It is often said that the least common thing in the world is common sense. Would it be a paradox to say that in the Catholic world the least common thing is Catholic common sense? That is why we seek to appropriate it to ourselves as an original trait. We are quite simply Catholic, but as Catholic as it is possible to be. We are Catholics all of one piece. And, because there are in our day many half Catholics, Catholics of their time, Catholics by accommodation, Catholics who consider themselves Catholic, we who are frankly Catholic, Catholics above all else, we pass, in the eyes of the crowd, as men set apart, maybe even extraordinary. This is the first trait of our character as Augustinians of the Assumption.¹

Instruction of 1868,

from The Essential d'Alzon ES p. 131-132)

¹ This definition or trait of the Assumptionist, such as Fr. d'Alzon described it and desired it, did not escape a certain typology of Catholic sensitivity in the 19th century, shared as well with other currents of thought, sometimes at odds with each other. Personally Fr. d'Alzon belonged to the current of Catholic die-hards called Ultramontane, in opposition to the liberal or national currents, that is to say in favour of papal pre-eminence and in opposition to certain liberal tendencies of contemporary groups and currents of thought which were taking shape in political, economic and philosophical spheres.

January 23

The freedom of the sons of God

The Kingdom of God within us consists in the most absolute dependence of our being and all our faculties on the intimate action of God. God is the master, we are the subjects: *Ego autem servus tuus et filius ancillae tuae*

.¹ Since he is our king – since he has the right to command us -since this right is as unlimited as his almighty power, his infinite knowledge and his boundless love for us – then we have no choice but to submit. We must obey him out of gratitude for all he has done for us – we must obey him with all the faculties which he himself has placed at our disposal.

What do we possess which doesn't belong to him? What is there that belongs to us and has not to be freely and willingly given over to his service? The most precious of all his gifts is, after all, the gift of freedom – and since he is entitled to the best we can give, it is by surrendering our very freedom that we honour him most.

It is a wonderful mystery how the more completely we allow God to reign over us, the freer we become – perfect obedience produces perfect liberty.

First Letter to the Master of Novices,

from the Essential d'Alzon

(ES p. 152-153)

¹ Quotation from Psalm 116:16. The history of salvation is like a thread running between human liberty and the confrontation with the tempter (our spiritual combat). Human beings must be on their guard: it is better for them and their happiness not to bite the fishhook of the tempter and fall prey like the gluttonous fish that swallows the lure along with the hook. The path of liberty is made up of experiences of liberation and purification.

January 24

Saint Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva

and Doctor of the Church, Patron of journalists

A method of prayer is indispensable. There are several of them, and I do not insist too much on any one in particular. However, it may be good for the Novice Master to propose the method of Saint Francis de Sales, as it is described in *The Introduction to the Devout Life*. Sometimes, one can and should practice mental prayer in the presence of the novices in order to initiate

them to the kind of reflection with which they must become familiar. As for topics of meditation, I hope to provide you with some very shortly for every day of the year. Meanwhile, I leave you free to choose those you want. Moreover, there are certain principles to be studied by those among you who wish not only to practice mental prayer but to train others in it later on. I would recommend two authors: Saint John of the Cross and Saint Francis de Sales. I am not excluding others; in fact, it would be good to consult them. But the two I suggest have been canonized. One belongs to a contemplative order; the other lived in the midst of apostolic activity and was in contact with Christians from all walks of life. The Church, by placing them on our altars, has guaranteed the purity of their doctrine.

Fifth Circular,

From □ The Essential d'Alzon

(ES p. 216)

Fr. d'Alzon, whose family traced its ancestry to this saint through the Roussy de Sales, also appreciated this founder of the Visitation nuns for his action with regard to Protestants, for his desire to make the spiritual life accessible to the laity and for his initiatives in favour of the media.

January 25

The Conversion of Saint Paul.

To strip oneself in order to be robed in the garment of faith

The whole work of perfection consists of two things, according to the writings of Saint Paul, to strip oneself and re-clothe oneself.¹ One strips oneself by an effort whose goal is to destroy in oneself every defect, every human attachment, and every imperfection. Harshness of character, over-indulgent bouts of sadness, discouragement, pride, touchiness, attachment to creatures, consolations, human joys, self reliance, a simply human way of thinking when all is going well, a certain laziness, a strong desire to avoid certain ordeals — all this and everything that resembles it must be carefully rooted from our souls. And most of all, the effort must be continual, if we do not want tepidness and cowardice to spread their moss into those small corners of the ground we have earned over the enemy. Yes, it is necessary to strip yourselves, and the more we are covered in the rags of our bad nature, the less we will be able to seek the garment of light that Our Lord destines for us.

Letter to the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament,

July 31, 1857

(Letters, vol. II, p.295)

¹ A reference to Rom 13:14.

January 26

Desire for Holiness

The lover wishes always to please his beloved, and if my heart belongs entirely to Jesus, this desire will be equal to my love for Him. Above all else, he wants me to be holy; if I do not strive to cooperate with this wish, there is something lacking to my love.

God alone is absolutely holy, yet Our Lord directs me to imitate Him: 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect'.¹ Jesus, God-made-man, and Mary, His mother, are also models I must imitate. When do I intend to take up this task in earnest?

The Directory, I, 5 "Desire for Holiness"

¹ Mt 5:7

² The desire for holiness is ever present in the life of Fr. d'Alzon; in particular he was inspired by a vow he took to be as perfect as possible (September 24, 1861).

January 27

Expansion of the heart and spiritual fatherhood

Dear friend, I often think about you and, as I have already told you, in my dreams themselves I picture you surrounded by a lovely and virtuous wife and a bunch of little ones. By giving up the pleasures of a family, I consider as compensation – if I could possibly desire compensation - your children, on whom I extend the enormous love I bear for their father.

Where am I going to lose myself? Friend, it is because I love you and, having called you to mind, my imagination can go far, as you see. Be happy, Luglien, within the family that God will bring to birth through you. For me, I feel my heart is being formed for another kind of fatherhood. Yes, it is true, my heart is enlarged with a universal love; I have an idea in myself of the immensity of a priest's heart, and it seems to me that mine is beginning to achieve it. Ah! my dear friend, you do not know what it is to give birth, like Saint Paul, to Christians until Christ is formed in them.¹ In my instructions to people living at home, I offer a very gentle training. From four or five families, I make only one family, for which I am the link, and whom I unite to Jesus Christ.

Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny,

February 11, 1832

(Letters, vol. A, p. 268-269)

¹ I Cor 4:15b

January 28

Saint Thomas Aquinas, theologian, Doctor of the Church

(in the interest of a theology constantly being renewed)

I will, I believe, take another advantage from my entry into this seminary: to be able to observe clearly in these places the decrepitude of the Scholastic carcass and its decomposition. It is both laughable and pathetic to see the torture that the students undergo once a day with one of their professors who persists in following the bastardized method of syllogism that resembles the logic of Saint Thomas in the same way that the Sorbonne resembles a council. It is also consoling to observe how some novel trends are taking root in a few heads that persist in crawling along worn-out roads. Several individuals who would be really annoyed if people thought they loved common sense have confessed to me that theology needs to be reworked, that reasoned proofs and all those drawn from Scripture and the Fathers are weak, unless one relies on the major principle of the authority of the Church. This makes me think that a well-written treatise on the Church would be sufficient to put many minds on the road of new theological developments and, in this way, bring back many of them from their illusions and even resolve their uncertainties.

Letter to Charles de Montalembert,

April 27, 1832

(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 8-9

¹ The end of the 19th century marked a return to the study of the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas, a return officially encouraged by Pope Leo XIII, a more scientific theological study known as Neo-Thomism that should not be confused with the Scholastic movement.

January 29

Apostolic zeal offered in a spirit of service

Since we belong to an apostolic Order,¹ we must endeavour, in so far as we can, to acquire the virtues demanded by such a sublime vocation. We must remember that *Our Lord came on the earth not to be served but to serve*

,² and we must consider ourselves as humble dependents of those for whom we work. They have rights over us, and we have no rights over them other than the one that Christ entrusted to us to lead them, however we can, to the holiness to which they are invited. This attitude is a

source of reverence, which is a safeguard both for them and for us. It is in the heart of Christ that they are dear to us. He loved them to the point of shedding his blood for them, and this will be the measure of our devoted efforts to help them to the holiness to which they are called.

The Directory, II, 11

On the Zeal for the Salvation of Humankind

¹ In 1845 it was Fr. d'Alzon's intention to form a religious order. History decreed that the Church would only permit his first foundation to be in the form of a congregation.

² Mt 20:28 or Mk 10:45

January 30

The spirit of a child as the spiritual way

I believe that to recapture a little love and the original freshness of love, it is necessary to become once again like a little child with Our Lord. This is what happened to me last night. After going to bed, I remembered that I had not said the prayer. *In Ego...*,¹ which is offered for the souls in purgatory. I relit my candle, I got up, and I offered the prayer before my crucifix. I detached it from its hook, and I took it with me to bed. I assure you that this childhood practice succeeded marvellously. I made a long meditation, better than I had made for a very long time. I believe that in general we make ourselves too important before God. Some acts of humility, of simplicity, of mortification would expand our hearts and would allow them to be filled more easily with the grace of a tender love.

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,

June 20, 1857

(Letters, vol. II, p. 265-266)

¹ The beginning of the very well known prayer, '*Oh good and very sweet Jesus*' that Pope Pius IX in 1858 had enhanced with a plenary indulgence, was to be recited before a crucifix and inserted in the prayers of thanksgiving for private graces said after Mass. The spirit of a child constituted one of the prominent features of the spiritual way of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. Another reference: Letters, vol. I, p. 34.

January 31

Saint John Bosco, patron of Christian educators

All Christian and religious education is summed up in these words of Saint Paul to the Galatians: *Fillioli mei quos iterum parturio, donec formetur Christus in vobis.*¹ The formation of Jesus Christ in souls: that indeed is the unique goal of education. In view of the fact that Jesus Christ reached perfect manhood (

in virum perfectum

), we will have given our students the best possible preparation for life when we will have provided them with the means of reaching the perfection of the God-man. The ideal purpose of education, it seems to me, is to transmit the following: a knowledge of Jesus Christ that takes into account all that he is and all that he does both as man and as God; a love of Jesus Christ based on the attractiveness of his gifts and of his beauty at once human and divine; a dedication to Jesus Christ in keeping with the sovereign rights of our King; an awareness of the rewards to which he invites us; a desire to carry out the duties and practice the virtues stemming from our relationship with Jesus Christ seen in this perspective.

Seventh Circular,

from the Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 235-236)

¹ Gal 4:19, "My dear children, once again, just like a mother in child-birth, I feel the same kind of pain for you until Christ is formed in you."

² The faces of Don Bosco and Fr. d'Alzon as educators of young people are united symbolically on a medallion decorating the modern altar in the church of Our Lady of Victories in Paris. Fr. d'Alzon dedicated the Assumption to the apostolate of education and teaching; this priority remains a living tradition in a number of its provinces today.

THE

MONTH

OF

FEBRUARY

The selections for the month of February have also been partly determined by the ordinary liturgical calendar, as well as by the feasts of the Presentation (2/2), Pius IX (2/7), Our Lady of Lourdes (2/11), and St. Bernadette Soubirous (2/18). The other days focus on the regular course of the Christian life, especially the sacramental journey (2/1, 2/3, 2/4, 2/5, 2/6, 2/8, 2/9) and then the distribution of the gifts of the Spirit, promised to the faithful at Pentecost according to Isaiah's prophecy.

D'Alzon's spirit is particularly alive in certain of the directives he gave to the Assumption, with regard to love of the Church, a sense of ecclesial communion, concern for doctrinal fidelity, the endless search to discover God's will, and knowledge of the faith, lived, studied, and re-examined at times of retreat. One easily finds here an echo of d'Alzon's personal example inviting one and all to the evangelical path of holiness.

February 1

The spiritual garment of Baptism

For the baptised Christian Jesus Christ is a kind of garment. Saint Paul tells his Galatian converts: “ *Quicumque baptizati estis, Christum induistis*”.¹ So he is our spiritual garment. When I was baptised I became clothed in his grace. And what can this mean except that my whole being – whatever I think, feel, say or do – must bear witness to him by whose blood we have been cleansed, renewed and regenerated. This is no trivial observation – it must be taken dead seriously because the Apostle (i.e. St. Paul) keeps on repeating it: “Circumcision means nothing, and the want of it means nothing – when a man is in Christ Jesus there has been a new creation” (Gal. 6:15). “

Induat vos Dominus novum hominem”.²

And what is this “new self” which was Adam. I am, indeed, a son of Adam. I bear his mark, which is that of Original Sin.

“Exuat vos Dominus veterem hominem cum actibus suis

.³” But my new self has superseded the old. What were the operative words when I took the religious habit? “May the Lord divest you of the old man and his acts” – that is to say his influence, the things he inclines you to do. This, then, is my task: to divest myself of Adam, of his sinful state and inclinations, and of the punishment they entail – and re-clothe myself (as I did when I was baptised, but more so now) in the “newness” of Jesus Christ – in his grace, in his gifts. But this does require my co-operation. I am offered the new garment – I must put it on, and prove myself worthy to wear it.

An Instruction by Fr. d'Alzon,

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 915)

¹ An approximate quotation of Gal. 3:27, *"All you who have been baptised in Christ's name have put on the person of Christ."*

² Eph 4:24, *"You must be clothed in the new self which is created in God's image"*

³ Col 3:9, *"You have stripped off the old self with its practices."*

Fr. d'Alzon never ceased to mention his first spiritual birth, his baptism, in Saint Peter's Church at Vigan, September 2, 1810.

February 2

The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple

Tomorrow we celebrate the feast of the Our Lord's Presentation in the Temple. This is his consecration for the sacrifice on the cross. Renew yourselves tomorrow with an unconditional

consecration to everything that the Divine Saviour may ask of you. Offer yourselves as a victim to his love and undertake all your actions in the great spirit of such a victim. Oh! Why don't you enter more deeply into all the mysteries of the Saviour's life? If you allow him, he will himself help you; but for that to happen it is necessary to have very great humility, a deep contempt for yourself, and a perfect disposition to accept every difficulty that may come your way, from the Divine Master. Tread this path gently but also courageously.

A Letter to Miss Céline Favier

(Letter vol. XIII, p. 29)

¹ Miss Céline Favier, a member of the Third Order of the Franciscans, lived in Le Vigan, first given spiritual direction by Fr. Hippolyte Saugrain and after 1874 by Fr. d'Alzon.

February 3

The gift of the Spirit

The Cenacle was the first seminary and could be called the most perfect apostolic seminary of them all. It only lasted a brief time because Christ had spent three years preparing for ministry men who understood hardly anything, *ipsi autem nihil horum intellexerunt*.¹ How many limitations these first seminarians had! Yet, when the Holy Spirit bestowed his gifts on them, what marvels did their words not accomplish! Let us ask the Holy Spirit to place himself on the lips of our priests and bishops and that he bestow the fullness of his light and his strength on the leader of his Church that he might be able to guide it by the hand in the midst of the dangers wrought by the malicious. Lord, do not leave us orphans; send us the spirit of obedience, so that, guided by the leaders inspired by you, we may have as pastors true apostles who will lead your Church to triumph over all its enemies with the virtue from on high.

A Homily by Fr. d'Alzon, published in Le Pèlerin,

1st June 1878, p. 359

¹ cf. Lk 18:34. The sacrament of Confirmation, given to the pupils at the prep school of the Assumption in Nîmes, marked one of the symbolic dates in the annual calendar in the life of this institution. In his instruction of 1847, Fr.d'Alzon reminds and questions: *'We received wisdom, however, in the sacrament of Confirmation.□ How have we used it?*

(
The Essential d'Alzon
, p. 1319-1320).

February 4

The sacrament of the Eucharist: 'I am the living bread, come down from heaven'¹

The Eucharist is a living bread, a divine bread, a thoroughly heavenly food and it is this mystery, considered to be the food of the Christian soul, that demands all our attention. The catechism gives the following definition of this adorable Sacrament: *the Eucharist is a Sacrament that really and truly contains the body, blood, soul and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ.*

We are going to meditate on the Body of Our Lord, the principle of purity; on his blood, the principle of life; on his soul, the principle of holiness, on his entire Divinity, the principle of glory.

Lent 1862,

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 953)

¹ *Jn 6:51: 'Ego sum panis vivus qui de caelo descendi'*. This passage of John's Gospel is part of a larger text, chapter 6, dedicated to the Passover of the bread of life, where after the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus in Capharnaüm presents himself as the real bread, the new manna and the new food in his flesh and in his blood, accessible by faith. The Christian is called to be fed by the Word made flesh, as he/she does with the bread which is the Word of God.

February 5

The sacrament of forgiveness and reconciliation

I am a sinner, and God, in his mercy, unceasingly offers me the blood of His Son so that I may be made clean in the pool of repentance. With what great respect must I not approach a sacrament in which I receive forgiveness for my sins through the merits of the blood of God!

My examination of conscience should be thorough; my confession, sincere and frank, and therefore short. It is to contrition that I must pay the greatest attention, because, if, through the grace of God, I have as a rule only venial sins to confess, it is not so much the detailed enumeration of them that is important, as the sorrow with which I make my accusation and the firmness of my resolution not to commit them again.

The Directory, III, 19, Confession

¹ The ministry of confession constituted one of the most time-consuming tasks of Fr. of Alzon, as Vicar General, in the cathedral of Nîmes where his confessional was besieged from the earliest hours of the day, and then also at the college. One can find reference to this reality, brief but eloquent, in one of his letters (vol. XIV, p. 395).

February 6

The sacrament of love in marriage

Before I address you, my dear cousins,¹ permit me to congratulate those around you who accompany you with their good wishes and to congratulate you myself for the act that you are about to make. Do we not see here two children of the most honoured families in the city of Nîmes? As we have enjoyed the example of those who preceded you, everyone here hopes that from these wonderful legacies the most precious part for you will be in reliving and carrying on their virtues. It is beneficial for our illustrious city to see these traditions continued in her midst, strong influences that, to various degrees and in various shapes, provide precious support for our admirable Catholic population... But I come back to you, young spouses, you are already happy with what you know of each other. You will continue to be so if, to the commitments you are about to take, you add the promise to be always worthy of those who formed you. Those who are no more with us ask this of you from on high; those who are alive expect from you, in return for the love that they poured into your hearts, Christian consolations, holy joys and life-giving hopes.

Sermon on marriage,

Letters, vol. XV, p. 254-255.

¹ Fr. d'Alzon descended from the Mérignargue family. This 23rd April 1873, Amédée of Mérignargues, a former pupil of Assumption high school, married Paule Demians, daughter of a former mayor of Nîmes, a friend of Fr. d'Alzon. How many such unions did he bless?

February 7

Blessed Pius IX

The great figure of Pius IX has hovered over the second half of the XIX century to teach people how to be appealing, gentle and firm, how to suffer with joy, how to persevere through ingratitude and lies, how to bear one's cross and follow Jesus Christ. He was a true vicar of God, a great pontiff, with a royal character not seen in a sovereign for centuries. But because the Church has lost its leader, it is not true that it has lost him forever. Shortly he will appear again, the chosen one of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit. One man succeeds another, the papal institution is imperishable as God promised. Yes, the institution on which the Church is built, the papacy, will remain. Only, remember that in so far as it contains two elements, the divine element and the human element, it is up to us to obtain all the perfection for the man who is assigned to provide what is necessarily called the inferior part of the papacy.

Homily by Fr .d'Alzon, published in Le Pèlerin,

23rd February, 1878, p. 122-123

¹ Pope Pius IX died on 7th February 1878. Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) promoted him to the ranks of the Beatified along with John XXIII (1881-1963) on 3rd September 2000, during the jubilee year. Fr. d'Alzon, tied up in Paris, went hastily to Rome in 1878 to pay him homage for the last time. The reputation of holiness of Pius IX was already great since the beginnings of his pontificate: Letters, vol. XIV, p. 362, n. 7.

February 8

The sacrament of Orders

Here you are, a priest, my dear friend!¹ You have received such an awesome power over the body of Jesus Christ. May the sacred deposit of faith be henceforth the object of your greatest respect, of your most tender care...that is, after the consecrated body of Jesus Christ. At the same time, care for the Word, that is to say, your preaching. Saint Augustine said: *Non est minus Verbum Dei quam corpus Christi*

.² The priest's jurisdiction over the Word of God flows from his jurisdiction over the body of Jesus Christ. You are aware of the words of Saint Alphonsus. Take care of your preaching, therefore, with respect, with faith, concerning yourself solely with the glory of God and the good of souls, and keeping yourself in the background as much as possible. I also want to quote the great Bishop of Hippo, whose teachings have always been my guiding rule. Listen to this magnificent passage:

non minus reus erit qui Verbum Dei negligenter audierit, quam ille qui corpus Christi in terram cadere negligentia sua permiserit

.³

Letter to Father Galeran

(Letters, vol. XV, p. 85)

¹ He is writing to Father Galeran (1831-1915), a former pupil of the Assumption, ordained a

priest 29th June, 1857 in Montpellier.

² A quote from Saint Cesarius of Arles, sermon 79: *'The Word of God is not less important than his body.'* *Corpus Christianorum, series latina, Vol. 103, p. 323.*

³ Also from Saint Cesarius, o. c., p. 324: *"the one who has listened inattentively to the word of God will not be less guilty than the one who, through carelessness, will have allowed the Body of Christ to fall on the ground"*

February 9

The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick

The death that, within five days, struck a devout person with whom I had a strong relationship, the manner in which she attended to her agony analyzing all her impressions, the terror that she had of her last breath until she received Extreme Unction, the calmness that followed her terror,

then the death of a priest close to my friends who, in departing, carried away the existence of a work to which he had dedicated eight laborious years, the grief that hastened his end, all of this gave me as it does you, a deep sense that life is a small thing and that everything that does not rest in God is fleeting. On this point we are both in perfect agreement and the conclusion is that, above all, it is necessary to work solely for God.

Letter to Mrs. de Chaponay

(Letters, vol. XV, p. 167-168)

¹ Mrs. de Chaponay, a native of Gard, born in Lascours, had Fr. d'Alzon as her spiritual director. A happy coincidence led to the discovery in 2001 of 71 of the Founder's signed letters, written between 1864 and 1880, preserved and classified in the Archives Department of the Rhone.

February 10

Meditate on the gifts of the Spirit

Since you are so happy to be a religious, it is necessary to be one to the end and to sacrifice yourself, not as you understand it, but as Our Lord understands it. I call you, during the retreat you are about to make, to meditate on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially on wisdom, understanding, counsel and fortitude. As for knowledge, reverence and fear of God, we will reflect on them later.¹

Letter to Sister Mary of the Blessed- Sacrament

(Letters, vol. II, p. 537)

¹ According to the Christian tradition based on an exegesis of Isaiah 11: 2 seven gifts are assigned to the action of the Holy Spirit: 'On him will rest the Spirit of Yahweh the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and the fear to Yahweh', detailed as follows according to theological and spiritual terminology: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, fear of the Lord and piety, included here nearly word for word by Fr. d'Alzon in his counsel for the spiritual direction of a Religious of the Assumption. It also appears at the end of his letter to Fr. Picard, on 11

th

March 1878, vol. XII, p. 36

February 11

Our Lady of Lourdes (Patron of the Provinces of France and Latin America).

[In order to purify the air with the breath of pilgrimages] we have commissioned steam locomotives to carry crowds of pilgrims to a host of shrines. We have sanctified these instruments often so sadly enslaved to a soul-destroying industry. Watch them puffing along on their new mission, shuttling thousands of fervent pilgrims to the famous shrines of our land. How well they beautify the fair face of France with their long caravans of repentance, atonement and love. Pilgrimages have come to stay – though there may be fewer of them when equally impressive manifestations of faith become more popular. What, after all, is a pilgrimage? It's a long procession, longer than the usual sort, and more efficacious because more penitential and demanding. By undertaking these prayerful journeys, the Church assumes possession of the public forum and comes out into the open air. We affirm our Faith for the whole population to see. Christians unafraid to affirm their Faith are well on their way to triumph

Instruction of 1873, from The Essential d'Alzon (ES ¶ p. 180)

¹ Very early on the Assumption was involved in the ministry of animating pilgrimages that has in return served to make it more visible and more known, in France and in the world. The first Assumptionists in Latin America fostered this culture of pilgrimages and the popular face of Christianity in particular (shrines, magazines). The Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes occurs on 11th February.

February 12

From one Council to another, doctrinal fidelity to the teaching of the Church

I am following with very great attention the progress of the Council, not so much in its deliberations as in the private conversations taking place outside and in the effects that may arise from the shock of so many contrary ideas and so many opposing trends. Oh well! I have come to the conclusion that that Congregation which seeks to draw, as far as it depends on it, all of the practical consequences of the Council, will be the one that God blesses most. From this point of view, it is very important that we render a positive account of ourselves before God of what we have to do, that we circumscribe our action to a certain extent and define it so as to make it as fruitful as possible and so as not to waste our strength... Without using a heavy hand but with a consistent plan, you must gather lay-people and priests around you, and, through your conversations, propose to attract to the workings of the Council all powerful minds over which you have some influence. Believe me, work as hard as you can in this sense.

Letter to Frs. François Picard and Vincent de Paul Bailly

(Letter, vol. VIII, p. 192)

Clearly, the work of beginning to mobilise the conciliar spirit consists as is very often the case in taking advantage of so many other opportunities. It means taking into account one's real strengths, consolidating resources, enhancing existing efforts, and pulling together individuals who are dispersed.

February 13

To pass through the superior door of Wisdom

Wisdom is that virtue which supplies our good actions with better motives. It is one of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11,2) – a precious gift, as precious as it is rare. If we examine the reality of Christian conduct, even at its best, we ascertain that it is far from perfect. It is tarnished by stains – it is of diminished brightness. The reason is that all our Christian acts are not performed for the highest Christian motives. Wisdom demands that they should be. Wisdom prescribes that whatever we do must be done with the thought of God at the back of our minds: *Sapientia timor Domini*.¹ Yet, far from this being the usual case, we perform the majority of our actions ‘any old how’ as if they didn’t matter, without taking God into consideration.

Instructions to the students at Collège de l'Assomption,

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 1315-1316)

¹ ‘The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.’ See Ps 110: 9, Sir 19:18 or Prov. 9:10 or 15:33. It is good concerning this biblical expression ‘fear of the Lord’ to recall this commentary from the 1st Letter of Saint John 4:18: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment and whoever fears has not reached the perfection of love.” One can conclude that the expression ‘fear of the Lord’ can no longer justify at all any Jansenist belief in the expression of the Christian faith.

February 14

Saint Cyril, monk, and Methodius, bishop, patrons of Europe

What is essential is that we pray a lot and put all our confidence in God. Sanctify yourselves, therefore, my dear children. Remember that Saints Cyril and Methodius, the first two apostles of the Bulgarians, were blood brothers.¹ Be courageous and always move forward! I don't know if I will be able to send you any help soon, but I dearly want to. You must perform miracles, in order to get vocations.

We have just taken charge of an orphanage of 300 boys, in Arras. We are going to send Father John Baptist, Brother Vital and Brother Joseph Maubon there. Undertaking this work meant that we have acquired a saint, Fr. Halluin, who lived for seven years on soldiers' rations in order to get his work off the ground.

A letter to Fr. Alexandre and Brother Jacques Chilie

(Letters, vol. VII, p. 185)

¹ There is a double allusion: the two Slavic saints were, on the one hand, two brothers like the

recipients of this letter and, on the other hand, Fr. Halluin, almost canonized by Fr. d'Alzon, developed his work with little means. It was an invitation for them to do the same in the Orient. Pope John Paul II, on 31st December 1980, raised the commemoration of the two Slavic Saints to the ranks of a feast and proclaimed them saints equal to Benedict as patrons of Europe. Saints Cyril and Methodius are celebrated on 11th May in the calendar of the Oriental Church. Since then, the patronage of Europe has been enriched by Pope John Paul II with the feminine figures of Saint Catherine of Siena (29th

April), Saint Bridget of Sweden (23rd

July) and Saint Theresa Benedicta of the Cross [Edith Stein] (9th

August).

February 15

Set free that understanding which leads to faith

A powerful means of communicating the power and strength of God lies in the hands of the teacher. It is by teaching, in the class-room, that we make his truth known. But see how inadequate our own intelligence is – surrounded by ignorance and uncertainty! This darkness must be lifted – this dense fog dissipated. How do we ourselves stand? We must take into account those obstacles which dwell in the depths of our own heart. We must be thoroughly conversant with the disciplines we shall have to impart and appreciate them for what they are worth. We must come to disown our purely personal inclinations which, though we know what is good, drive us constantly in the direction of evil (Rom. 7:15). The light of faith brings these miseries into clear light. Stripped of pride, stripped of deception, stripped of self-illusion, we will at last be disposed to open the doors of our mind, and welcome truth – the truth to which we must henceforth be willingly and courageously crucified. It is this truth which will set us free (John 8:32): free from the slavery of our own flagging will. It is this truth which will make us long to escape from this confusion in which we find ourselves entangled – and out into God's fresh air and bright sunshine.....The truth is not only the object of a system, an object of thought for

the Christian. Truth is something we learn to love. He who searches for it – he who yearns for it – finds it, clings to it, and will not let it go (Song of Songs 3:4). Truth has become his consuming passion.

Instructions at Collège de l'Assomption,

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 1331-1332)

February 16

The spirit of discernment and good counsel

Beware of those people who come to new confessors with all kinds of stories. They really are not telling you the whole story. It happened to me as well; I gave my crucifix to one of these Bohemians, and then I heard later from the police that she had deceived I don't know how many people. For my part, after having dealt with her so well, I would treat her a little less gently in the future. There are vipers who make deception a profession. I am not saying that you should never believe anyone, nor that she may have done something four times more than she admitted; but if she ended up by delivering a beautiful declaration of love, as ugly as you are, nothing would surprise me in this merry-go-round, and later she would hand you back your crucifix as proof of your connection. You should tell her to make a novena, do the Stations of the Cross, and fast. Only fasting and prayer can cast out some demons, says Our Lord.¹

Letter to Fr. Victorin Galabert

(Letters, vol III, p. 144)

¹ Mt 17:21. Fr. d'Alzon did not confuse the virtue of prudence with pusillanimity. He knew from experience that a priest's conduct in his ministry demanded a sharp sense of psychology as much human as spiritual. Fr. Galabert was sufficiently humble not to be offended in any way by this rather unflattering portrait he received from his superior in this situation.

February 17

Seek out and accept God's will as you ponder with faith the signs of his action

What if I compare myself to Abraham who had but one son, who in his turn had only two, one of whom was exiled, and yet Abraham became the father of God's people¹? This was the experience of Dom Guéranger²; there were hardly any novices at Solesmes during his lifetime. Since his death, more than eighty have entered and his debt of nearly a million had nearly been paid off. I try as hard as I can to follow God's will that has appeared little by little, in a way so wonderfully his own. Our alummates in the South of France cost us 30,000 francs a year, and we find the money day by day. For me this is an endless miracle which makes us to practice poverty by forcing us to sacrifice our many extravagances to the need of raising money for these dear children, one coin at a time. For six weeks I have not had a red cent in my possession. If I want to go out, I have to ask, like some schoolboy, for the price of the train ticket.

Letter to Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus

(Letter vol. XIII, p. 62)

¹ The story is in Genesis 21.

² The abbot of Solesmes, Dom Guéranger (1825-1875), died on 30th January 1875.

February 18

Saint Bernadette Soubirous

You are absolutely right: we must become saints. At Lourdes I asked for my conversion, for the spirit of prayer and for the gift to inflame souls, and to make Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin loved. I send you Bernadette's photograph, who is today a Sister of Nevers. Why did the Blessed Virgin choose this ignorant and unrefined peasant girl, who did not know how to read or write, nor understand what the Immaculate Conception meant? I will bring you a small plant picked from the very place where the miraculous spring flowed.

Letter to Mother Marie Correnson

(Letters, vol. VII, p. 136).

¹ Fr. d'Alzon wrote to Mother Correnson on 17th April 1879: 'Bernadette died yesterday, at half-past 3, I was told. *God used her for very great things and then placed her in salutary obscurity*'.

As of 1868 something profound took place in the relationship between Lourdes and Fr. d'Alzon, who held in great esteem the parish priest of the time, Fr. Peyramale.

February 19

To ask for the strength to escape a feeling of spiritual numbness

What gives me pleasure in your letter is that you ask for strength; I believe that you will only receive it through confident obedience. You must let yourself be forced to do that which you would not dare do alone. You know what is good, you desire what is beautiful, holy, great, and perfect. And if all this could come to your soul, as you look to heaven, how marvellous that would be! Oh well! My daughter, you have to work and strive for the perfection that God wants from you. Your soul is like those sleeping gardens in winter under a double covering of dead leaves and snow. But come the spring, everything grows green again and the repose of the dead season gives way tenfold to the vitality of new life during those first magnificent days. You have been long enough under your snow and asleep. Saint Paul urges that, when the hour sounds, one wake up and rise.¹ I do not know why I am persuaded that I will not have lost anything in waiting for results.

A Letter to Angéline Chaudordy

(Letters, vol.V, p. 428-429)

¹ Eph. 5:14.

February 20

To lose oneself is to enter into a state of selflessness

How you always remain the same! You can spend half an hour of conversation with a friend and it transforms you. And yet every day you have hours to give to Our Lord, the friend par excellence, and you are not affected at all! Dear girl of little faith and little love¹! When will you begin to understand that self-seeking is vanity, as is seeking to possess every creature? What matters above all else is to lose oneself in God? See, my daughter, in the end it is necessary to begin a life of holiness and you must renounce all your complaints, your whisperings about others, your compassion for yourself. You must seek and want nothing other than God, in all things, everywhere. Oh! When will we be concerned only with his truths and his eternal interests?

Letter to Eulalie de Régis

(Letters, vol. VI, p.23)

¹ According to Mt 8:26. Eulalie de Régis, a girl from the high society of Nîmes, was one of the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament at the beginning. She also desired to be one of the first Oblates and wanted to receive their religious habit on her deathbed. A large gift from her inheritance provided for the construction of the chapel on rue Séguier. Fr. d'Alzon undertook to

compose for this woman that he directed a biographical note in her memory, partly written and partly incomplete.

February 21

Know how to take time off for retreats in order to let your body and soul breathe

It is already the sixth day of my retreat. I have eight or nine days left but, it seems to me, that I can begin to speak to you about myself. You may well ask me: *'Why make such a long retreat?'* First of all, the saints made forty day retreats. Well, it is because I am not a saint that I wanted a little longer to reflect, and I congratulate myself for this decision. I spent the first days under the weight of a physical fatigue that had me sleeping ten to twelve hours a day, either at night, in the afternoon, or even in my armchair. I believed I had to let myself give in to this need to sleep without too many scruples. Now I am beginning to get a little upset with myself, because it is necessary to put an end to all this. Here is what I'm thinking; let me share it with you. It is certain that, from experience, this is the time of the year when I sleep more, after the very tiring nights of summer, although this year I did not suffer too much from this; still, I had a lot more mental fatigue, because of the funeral rites for Father Durand, my articles on the English (Oxford) movement, my speeches on the occasion of the distribution of awards, etc. In my opinion I will do well to adopt little by little the habit of sleeping in a way that is not too scandalous.

Letter to Fr. François Picard

(Letters, vol. VI, p. 110-111)

Fr d'Alzon seems to stress that a retreat can start with a good period of rest, as long as it doesn't turn into one prolonged catnap. Sleepiness, good for the body, can become mortal for the soul. One author wrote that 'to sleep was to lose interest'.

February 22

The Chair of Saint Peter in Rome. An Ecclesial awareness and love of the Church

We love the Church because she contains within her bosom the sum total of God's bounty. Christ, her Divine Spouse, has confided all these treasures to her keeping, these treasures which the Revolution detests. In her we find truth proclaimed, the law of perfection, the nursery of all virtue. She is the true Kingdom of God here below,¹ the assembly of the saints and of Christ's disciples. In her we behold stability amid societies which are crumbling. In her we receive God's assurance of a happiness which man alone could never attain. Through her we are given the necessary impetus to take off from this our land of earthly exile, and fly upwards towards that realm of that eternal and glorious home to which we truly belong. All of this surpasses human nature. All of this belongs to the divine order of things. All of this comes to us through Jesus Christ and is bestowed on us only in his Church. That is why we must look upon and love the Church from God's point of view.

Instruction of 1868,

from the Essential d'Alzon(ES p.137)

¹ The formula of Fr. d'Alzon readily identifies the Church with the Kingdom. However, Scripture does not identify the Church with the Kingdom: the Church is the anticipation, the figure that announces the realities of the Kingdom (Mt 13:53; 18:35)

Peter confessed Jesus' divine mission, and Jesus, in exchange, gave him the wonderful mission to be the rock on which the Church would be founded. In this marvelous way Jesus introduced Peter to his own ministry. Wanting to construct a building on earth as lasting as the centuries, he took a fisherman from Galilee and put him as the foundation: *Tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo Ecclesiam meam*

¹

Let's examine: 1° the privilege of Peter; 2° the union that we must establish with him. It is not flesh nor blood that revealed to the son of John² that Jesus was the Christ acknowledged from afar by the patriarchs and prophets. It was a revelation from heaven that enlightened him, but, faithful to the light from on high, he believed and he spoke. *Credidi propter quod locutus sum.*³

Meditations on the Chair of Saint Peter,

Meditations on Religious Perfection,

vol. I, BP, p. 83-84

¹ “You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church”: Mt 16:18.

² Mt 16:17.

³ *I believed, this is why I spoke*” from Ps 116: 10 (Vulgate).

February 23

To make provision for God and remain a soul of desire

I hope that you have recovered a little from the first emotions of your arrival. For this reason I take the liberty to speak to you a little more seriously and to remind you that the most legitimate joys are dead, that you must therefore think about God and about what is eternal. What did you do until 15th December for eternity? You were not content with singing throughout the summer, you have to sing in the autumn and even in winter. This is more than the cicada.¹ What provisions have you made? What have you set aside for your soul? What are you counting on to put in your storehouse from now on? Your soul, your soul! Oh! My daughter, how foolish to think about anything else, when we do not think about God and his Church! It is a great misfortune of our condition that the most magnificent dispositions of the soul produce so few practical results, and yet it is always a good thing to keep on desiring. It is impossible that nothing remains. Thus, I urge you to desire much, especially Holy Communion. You must desire to be gentle, humble, patient, poor, despised, mortified, penitent, charitable, a woman of prayer, penetrated by God's presence, obedient, zealous for the interests of the Church, and united with the whole of your being with all the intentions of Our Lord.

Letter to Mrs. de La Prade

(Letter vol. III, p. 348)

¹ Here Fr. Alzon embroiders images taken from LaFontaine's fable on the cicada (grasshopper) and the ant.

February 24

The gift of peace, one of the signs and fruits of the Spirit

Hardly had I arrived here for a short rest than I felt the fatigue of the rather excessive work that I have had to accomplish recently. It resulted in a heavy bout of flu that almost kept me an absolute prisoner, with a violent headache that was extremely unpleasant. I congratulate you on being able to make your retreat and I find you happy in feeling the closeness of God; benefit from it to be penetrated by the reality of his being and with the falsehood of everything that is not from him. It is with immense happiness that I see you resting under his hand¹; and, in the end, what could I wish for you more than his peace? It is extraordinary that so much time is needed to understand the extent of this word, "peace."

Letter to Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus

(Letters vol. VI, p. 211)

¹ Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus was very worried about the machinations of Father Véron, the former ecclesiastical superior of the Religious, who wanted to encroach on the government of their Congregation to the detriment of the rights of a Superior General. This gave rise to her journey to Rome in May/June 1866, with the intention of seeking approval of the Constitutions and recognition of the Institute with papal rights.

How beautiful is the flow of this prayer of Mother Teresa of Calcutta: *'The fruit of silence is prayer; the fruit of prayer is faith; the fruit of faith is love; the fruit of love is service; and the fruit of service is peace.'*

February 25

Ask the Spirit of God for the grace of renewal

Be under no illusion. The work must start all over again, not that we need to have new rules, or new practices, but we must have a new spirit. It is the cry of the *Miserere, et Spiritum rectum innova in visceribus meis*¹; it is the continual renewal of this spirit of uprightness to which we must aspire. It is necessary to serve God in his truth and without falsehood. When we say to him: '*My God, I love you*', we must prove it by our deeds. This is absolutely what is needed. My daughter, let us walk in the truth and give Our Lord an immense love. In the depth of our heart, and in the details of our life, we are going to love all the sacrifices that come our way, and we will offer them up joyfully and cheerfully. We will move forward propelled by love, and whatever God shows us that is better, we will choose, because in everything we want to reach for the heights.

Letter to Marie Correnson

(Letters, vol. VII, p. 150)

¹ According to Psalm 51:1a and 12b: *'Have mercy and restore in my breast an upright spirit'* (Vulgate).

February 26¹

A benevolent and smiling outlook salted with the spirit

I should have sent a reply to five of you; I prefer to greet you with a collective epistle. I have been inviting those who want to come to Le Vigan to come. In fact, no one comes. Thanks! And some will say that I am sensitive! One has to expect to be slandered. Full stop. New paragraph.

A Sister is now asking her neighbour who, then, the fifth person is to whom Fr. d'Alzon owes a response. I cannot count more than four. I answer: it depends. In the style of Fr. Jean-Marie. Another is saying: *'My, there are a lot of paragraphs'*. In the style of Dupanloup.

Would you like another one? For example, like this one. Look at the bees gather about in the light of the rising sun, across the meadows flushed with flowers and how they are collecting the sweet honey from which they form their precious treasure for the winter season. My daughters, for whom my paternal delight ceaselessly swells, I pray that anon you will be gathering about in that garden where the preacher of the retreat will present to your eyes' delight and to your mystical sense of smell perfumed rows of flowers (no allusion to Sr. M. Julie). Whew! This kind of talk chokes me to death. Does it do the same to you?

Let's try another approach. During that time of progress traversed by a humanity emancipated by the principles of (17)89, it is impossible to conceive of a nun turning back to the Middle Ages in order to become a religious. That civilization which made the byways and imitates them, under the pretext of these paths, required if the century is condemned to see some religious sisters, these sisters are at the height of modern thinking and the sacred tribune that is going to lead you towards those summits which raise up your understanding, into what abysses must your hearts plunge at pushing these poor victims of a past obedience towards the conception of the marvels which fill the present epoch, and to which the general Exhibition has begun to act as cradle. There you are; you have three styles to choose from.

Letter to Sister Marie des Anges Hugues

(Letters, vol. VI, p. 366)

Ed. Note: In this passage, Fr. d'Alzon is clowning around with his correspondents and uses a style which is as difficult to understand in French as it is in English.

February 27

Concern for the happiness of others, fruit of the spirit of charity

Are you not surprised to see my writing, supposing that you still remember it? I am in Bagnères enjoying the waters, and while thinking things over, I thought of you. I received news about you a little while ago. I was told that you were “a charming young man.” It does not surprise me, but I was feeling a bit conceited.¹ Good gracious! I said, puffing myself up, hasn't the Assumption helped me at all in this regard? For I attributed to myself, very humbly, some of your charm. I added – for my part - but these charms, will he only use them for himself? If only I could help him bring happiness to someone else! There is in the world a certain individual in whom I have an interest, whom I have known since he was a child, of impeccable character, – I can guarantee that– from a very honourable family He could help you in your career, although I am told that you do not lack your own patrons.

Letter to Paul Fraise

(Letters, vol. VII, p. 120-121)

¹ Translation of the French *faire jabot*..

February 28

To live his faith with a sense of ecclesial communion

There is probably a very strong and very Catholic reason for this divine insufficiency, if I can put it thus; because if by throwing ourselves into the arms of God, we were always and on all occasions able to pass ourselves off as His creatures, we would quickly become Protestant, that is to say isolated, and the bond with the spiritual society that God wanted to establish among souls through his Church would disintegrate very quickly. But it is not less true that it is quite humiliating for us to think that Jesus Christ, reigning in the fullness of his love in the depth of our hearts, is not enough for us. Or maybe we should say that he no longer reigns there as sovereign But in this case how can we be at rest inasmuch as his empire is not unshakeably

established?

Letter to Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus

(Letters, vol. I, p. 101)

February 29

A path of holiness through the doors of regularity, obedience, charity and humility

I am doing my best to attract lots of individuals to come and drink the water of desire to become Oblates. Will we succeed? Yet is it not necessary for us to do this! This year must be for those

who stay another year of progress and growth in holiness!

That is why it might be much better, than it would seem, that I delay my trip for 48 hours. I give you this additional time to begin the work of your conversion; I want you to sanctify yourselves by all means possible, but especially by regularity, obedience, charity and humility. We will continually come back to these points during the year.

Regularity. What will become of a religious who does not observe the rules? Obedience, which is continually exercised in imitation of *Our Lord who was obedient and obedient unto death on the cross.*¹

Charity. The love of Our Lord that produces a love for souls, especially the souls who belong to our spiritual family. Finally, humility which prevents the little good we do from being spoiled by self-importance. By keeping us in our place, which should always be the last place, it also leads us to accept happily everything that will really help us really to forget ourselves.

Letter to the Oblates of the Assumption

(Letters, vol. VII, p. 155)

¹ Ph. 2:8

THE

MONTH

OF

MARCH

In its turn the month of March features several feasts in the liturgical calendar: Sts. Perpetua and Felicity (3/7), St. Marie-Eugénie de Jésus (3/10), St. Cyril of Jerusalem (3/18), St. Joseph (3/19), and the Annunciation (3/25). We have deliberately given a Lenten tone to the month of March by favoring the spiritual accents of this liturgical season: love of others, spiritual combat, correction of faults, selflessness, letting God act, sickness, decision-making, patience, character reform, life-style, and strength of will. The last days of the month of March are dedicated to Holy Week whose occurrence varies from year to year depending on the date of Easter: Palm Sunday (3/24), the Washing of the Feet (3/26), Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (3/27), The Passion of Christ (3/29), the Cross of Christ (3/30), the Darkness (3/31).

March 1

An invitation to supernatural effort and distinction

We find ourselves at a crossroads. We can choose between a bare and rugged mountain track and a pleasant path through rich and fertile valleys.¹ Few travellers choose the mountain track – whereas the road through the valleys echoes to the tread of millions of comfortable feet. They represent, respectively, the path of distinction and the path of banality. To distinguish ourselves we must climb up that steep slope onto the mountain. It's much easier to walk down into the valley – but beware! There are hidden dangers down there – fatal pitfalls where least expected.

Up you go! – higher and higher still. We can see the mountain top before us and it is there that God lives. Efforts will be called for, pain and perseverance – but take courage. Keep your eyes fixed on the goal and the loving presence of our God will give you strength to surmount every obstacle.

Instruction for a retreat,

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 1118)

¹ This small apologue of Fr. d'Alzon, contrasting a mountain with a small valley, is inspired by biblical passages, either Lk 13:24 (story of the narrow door), or others that refer to the holy mountain, a symbolic place of divine revelation and of the days of Jesus' prayer, and the plain and the city, places for meeting people or the crowds. In this sense, Lent evokes the time of a spiritual journey upwards for the preparation of the feast of Easter, comparable to the exodus in the Old Testament and to the time of the going up towards Jerusalem in the New Testament on the way of Jesus' Passion.

March 2

The Spiritual fight, illuminated by love

I cannot repeat this to you too often: the condition of all human life, and, for even greater reason, of all Christian life, is a struggle, it is a fight.¹ For one who claims to have reached perfection, what's the use? To suffer and to fight, this is our lot until our last breath. I have to admit that this perspective is sad for those who do not love; but when God's love is deep within the soul, suffering, trial, and the combat become necessary.

Letter to Eulalie de Régis

(Letters, vol. I, p. 96)

¹ 1 Tim 4:10 and 6:12. Fr. d'Alzon mentions and recommends reading works dedicated to this theme of spiritual combat repeatedly, notably in the monastic tradition in the works of John Cassian or Saint Theodore the Studite or Lorenzo Scupoli, an Italian Theatine, author of a work with this title, which saw more than 600 printings.

March 3

Serving the Lord requires a positive choice

Today I want to share some of my reflections with you. The first is that you are cut out much more for a life as you envisage it than for any other. You are obliged, therefore, to seek Christian perfection, that is, a more perfect imitation of Our Lord. To do so, you must know him and love him; and no one can get to know Our Lord well except through persistent prayer; then, the only way to imitate him well is by mortification – this is what he himself said.¹ My dear child, there are two rules, somewhat strict, that I give you at the beginning: pray and engage in asceticism. It is impossible to serve two masters²: your body, your senses, your imagination, your heart, your self-esteem, and, at the same time, Jesus Christ. This is the reason why you have to make a choice and take it seriously.

Letter to Amélie de Pélissier

(Letters, vol. I, p. 116)

¹ This may refer to the Gospel texts of Lk 18:1 or Mt 6:24.

² Mt 6:24.

March 4

Holding on to the language of faith: renunciation and death to self

God grants you many graces, therefore, and urges you ever more to give yourself to him. Take heart! Take heart! Do not waste a moment and remember that we must renounce ourselves continually, to die to ourselves and to take advantage of every consolation that overflows into our souls so that we may always be able to give of ourselves with greater zeal to that which is asked of us. How many sacrifices must we not make in return for the grateful heart which God has put into us! I hope, then, that this devotion that you tell me has come to comfort your misery will be a totally new starting-point for you and that, with the grace of Our Lord, you will become quite another person. After all, is this not the only thing for which we must strive?

Letter to Mrs. de Rocher

(Letters, vol I, p. 151-152)

Mrs. de Rocher, born de Forton, a relative of Fr d'Alzon, was also one to whom he gave spiritual direction. A mother of a family, a member of the Third Order of the Assumption, she had several children, two of whom became nuns, Thérèse, who joined the RAs ,and Marie, the

Sisters of the Sacred Heart. The letters of Fr. d'Alzon have also made us familiar with the first names of three of her sons: Henri, Joseph-Gaston and Paul-Louis, pupils at the collège in Nîmes.

March 5

In the spiritual life, favor the spirit of love over the spirit of fear

I know that it is sometimes difficult to choose the right path when one is seventeen or eighteen years old. I don't believe that there is an age for which Our Lord reserves more mercy than that one. There are, at this age, so many dangers to face that it is necessary to discover from Our Lord which of our weaknesses seem to prevent us from doing good.

Continue reading, my dear Adolphe, what you have told me about. Only, I confess that I do not really like the tone of hopelessness found in Massillon: he is a man who damns you by dint of threatening you with hell. Certainly, it is very important that we reflect on salvation and eternity; but, next to God's justice, I think that it is always important to speak about his goodness; and, although one should not abuse this, there is something in the feeling of filial trust that touches God's heart more and disposes him more in our favour.

Letter to Adolphe Amouroux

(Letters, vol. I, p. 220)

Adolphe Amouroux was a former pupil of the Collège de l'Assomption in Nîmes, originally from Perpignan, who later became a lawyer and President of the Association of former pupils, very closely bound to Fr. d'Alzon.

March 6

Patience in education, like that in the cultivation of the interior being

A thousand thanks, my dear friend, for the details that you gave me about our children. You should not be overly discouraged because some do badly and others are slow. You must imitate the admirable patience of Our Lord, who was never discouraged. There will come a time, as from God, when the Holy Spirit will breathe on all these small hearts, bombarded by sin, and life will be reborn; and love and warmth will return there, where we could only see dead ashes.

For those who are doing well, do not press them either. Fear those plants doused with lime: forced vegetation is neither stronger nor more lasting. For the rest, dear friend and dear son, how can you hold on? Everybody asks me this question, and I, who love you as you know, I do the same, adding: the Devil, what does he think; will he let you sleep in peace when you have snatched people from him? As you unmask one of his tempting traps proposed to some of your pupils, doesn't he tempt you to fall into a nasty hole dug by your pride? Is your thinking always quite pure and correct towards God? You understand the reason why I ask you these questions. They are truly my children, but are you not one of my eldest sons?

Letter to Jules Monnier

(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 139-140)

A portrait will be dedicated, later, to this lovely person, Jules Monnier, a teacher and spiritual son of Fr. d'Alzon.

March 7

Saints Perpetua and Felicity, martyrs of Africa

This week the church celebrates the feast of a young Christian, committed in marriage. It pleased heaven to show us her vocation as one of the most beautiful examples of the struggle to give oneself to God alone. A simple catechumen, 22 years old and the mother of a child at the breast, it did not seem the right time for Perpetua to confess her faith in Christ. Her father's ardour in favor of idols preserved her from the suspicion of her persecutors. However, an angel

brought her the proposition of martyrdom; Perpetua was arrested and had herself baptized in jail... Perpetua fell asleep; she dreamt about her victory in the circus, the beasts in retreat, a demon coming in the form of an Egyptian, and her flooring him with her heel. And she left in glory by the Vivaria Gate... Perpetua herself guided the executioner's trembling hand to her throat. They carried the precious relic through the Vivaria Gate and today she lies on the altars to obtain for all those whom God calls, strength in the struggles of flesh and blood.

Le Pèlerin, March 2, 1878, p. 146-147

The Collège de l'Assomption in Nîmes was in the parish of Saints Perpetua and Felicity, in Nîmes. Fr. d'Alzon, a friend of the Pastor Goubier, preached there many times.

March 8

Those who do not advance move backwards

You know how much I love you, and, therefore, how happy I am to receive news about you. Send me more and add lots of detail. In this respect, Fr. Ivan is kinder than you, and as a result I learn from him the things that Fr. Galabert sometimes forgets to tell me. Strive mightily for holiness; lead to holiness as well the children entrusted to you; pray for the conversion of the

Russians and the Bulgarians. There is so much to do everywhere; no matter how busy you are, do everything energetically. Those who do not advance move backwards, in knowledge as well as in devotion.

Letter to Francesco Schichkov

(Letters, vol. XII, p. 650)

Francesco Schichkov or Schiskov, according to different transcriptions, (1850-1929) was one of the first Bulgarian Assumptionist religious in the Congregation. Originally from Philippopoli (Plovdiv) where Fr. Galabert established the first community in the Orient in 1864, he was ordained a priest in 1874 and was the first to pass voluntarily to the Slavic rite in 1883. He dedicated himself mainly to the service of religious vocations in Karagatch (Andrinopolis), but he was also a preacher, confessor and secretary to Bishop Petkov, according to the needs and emergencies of the mission. The name of Schichkov [Schiskov or Chichkov] was the last name of several Assumptionist religious, notably two brothers, Bartholomew (1867-1931) and Matthieu (1850-1892). Fr. Josaphat Schiskov (1884-1952) was beatified with two other Assumptionists, Frs. Pavel Djidjov and Kamen Vitchev, on May 26, 2002 by Pope John Paul II in Plovdiv.

March 9

Adopt a regular rule of life

You told me that you wanted a revolution to take place in you, and that you felt that God wanted to seize your soul. Later you asked me for a rule of life. It is important that you recall the ideas that I consider to be fundamental. For example, a Christian is one who never wants to waste any of his time and wants, in fact, to serve God with a certain energy. Also remember that you often told me that, given the independent streak in your character and your inclination to laziness, you needed obedience, penitence and activity. Based on this, here is the rule of life that I propose to you.

Take the time necessary to sleep. I would like you to go to bed at 10 o'clock and rise at 6: make half an hour's meditation, then go to Mass, which you should miss as little as possible. You should receive communion at least three times a week, more often if you want to. Return home; read some passages from the New Testament. Organise a little time before noon for quiet reflection. In the morning read a serious book for an hour or two at least. In the evening, your exercises should include pious reading, the rosary and a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Before going to bed, examine your conscience searching for any acts of disobedience, laziness, pointless words, and any failings of charity.

Letter to Angéline Chaudordy

(Letters, vol. XI, p. 155)

March 10

The Feast of Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,

foundress of the RAs (1817-1898)

Reflection on a friendship in the twilight of one's life

All said and done, let me repeat to you how happy I was with our conversations; I understood later what you said and what you left me to work out. Evidently, we have to make preparations for our final arrangements here below and our final judgment. Let us pray earnestly for each other, so that we may be treated with great mercy. I understand that what happened in Nîmes¹ exhausted you and broke your heart. That's life. I, who am sheltering myself more and more in solitude, I see many things falling apart, including people. That makes one suffer. Ah! What can I say: Only God remains; and a few friends when God permits it! I place you in the front row of those who remain close to me.

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus

(Letters, vol. XIII, p. 121)

¹ Between 1876 and 1879, concerning the direction of the priory of the Religious of the Assumption in Nîmes, there arose serious disagreements and differences of opinion between Fr. d'Alzon and Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, but this period of tension, lived out in great openness, did not diminish in any way the esteem, confidence and friendship that existed between them.

Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus and Fr. d'Alzon had made a commitment to devote themselves to her perfection, a commitment he maintained and which was recognized by the Church. She was proclaimed blessed by Pope Paul VI, in Rome, in 1975, and canonized in 2007 by Pope Benedict XVI.

March 11

A Prayer of blessing

Blessed are you, O Lord, for having arranged all things, creating us in such a way that we cannot reach true greatness unless we search for your glory! Blessed are you for everything that you do for us! Ah! May your name be blessed forever! If until the present we have been possessed by a misguided love of self which has led us far from you in search of deceptive glory or criminal vanity, we now understand that the goal of our existence means putting an end to our own greatness. Have we not done enough for ourselves, and haven't you in some way exhausted the treasures of your wealth in obliging us to recognize that you alone are the true Lord? Have not our humiliations, our miseries, and the sense of our degradation made us even more aware of the immensity of our crime when we insult your divine majesty and when we try to darken the rays of your glory? Lord, open our eyes to our true destiny, and make us understand that seeking to glorify you on earth is our first duty, and is the surest means of reaching our true greatness in eternity.

On God's glory (T.D., vol. 42, p. 186)

March 12

Let God act by handing over to him the control of our wills

The state of your soul does not surprise me at all; in spite of your difficulties, you must persevere. God acts in you. He saw you two years ago and sees you today; God knows well what changes you have been through. Let God act in the ways that he knows best. I had been waiting for your letter in the country, where I would have had more time to answer you. Offer to Our Lord some small sacrifice; ask him to inspire you more and more with Christian thoughts and with the Christian sense of things. You will have completely found your mission the moment you say to God, like Isaiah: *'Here I am. Lord, send me'*,¹ and then you will have developed a disposition to do anything requested of you.

Letter to Amélie de Pélissier

(Letters, vol. I, p. 202)

¹ A quote from Isaiah 6:8. Amélie de Pélissier received spiritual direction from Fr d'Alzon. A native of Nîmes, she hesitated for a long time in making her life choice. She also visited the Religious of the Assumption in Paris and ended up getting married in 1856 to a widower, Louis Joseph-Josias de Gaillard d'Escures. Her sister, Anaïs de Pélissier, became a widow after her first marriage to M. de Chazelles and married a second time to Louis Léon - Raymond de Courtois. The correspondence of Fr. d'Alzon often evokes questions bound up with the complications and family tensions born out of these different alliances.

March 13

To move from good intentions to firm decisions

What has become of you, my dear child? What happened to the series of questions that you were about to ask me concerning your future perfection? Has the post office been unfaithful? Have your wonderful plans taken flight? Are you sick? Why this silence on your part? Did you not receive the few lines that I sent you under via Fr. Emmanuel while waiting for your long letter? Yet, time is running out. ' *Work, while it is still da* ', says Our Lord; *'the night is coming when one will not be able to work anymore'*.¹

Hurry up, then, not only in writing to me, but especially setting in motion the wonderful plans of holiness that will result. I am counting on a very prompt reply to my questions and, then, on this set of questions that will prove to me your strong desire to renew yourself; we are fast approaching November 21

st

and it seems to me that at this moment many excellent things should already be underway.

Letter to Miss Louise Chabert

(Letters, vol. IX, p. 211)

¹ Jn 9:4. Louise Chabert, another resident of Nîmes who received spiritual direction from Fr. d'Alzon, participated in a number of apostolic activities of the Founder and entered the Oblates of the Assumption in Nîmes shortly after the death of her parents, with the name of Sister Louise de Gonzague, but she was not able to continue. The Assumption remained in contact with her until her death in 1930.

March 14

Recovery and counter-recovery (the temptation of the tongue)

In the gospel Our Lord desired to heal a deaf-mute.¹ Well, if our Divine Master returned to earth, I would implore him to perform a miracle of another kind: to remove the tongue from a host of people. What horrible abuse they make of it! Leave to one side the injuries, the provocations, and the vulgar lies. Has not the tongue established a reign of lies and errors wherever it can find a foothold? Look at the philosophical systems, the novels, the atheistic courses, and the lodges of the freemasons. To the spoken word attach the written word, from the chair of pestilence,² already in the days of David, to the infectious pen of a crowd of journalists. What poisons are abundantly poured out everywhere with the help of speeches, daily papers, dramas, and conferences! Who can enumerate the forms donned by all this ranting invented to kill purity in the heart and truth in the mind?

Le Pèlerin, March 23, 1878, p. 192

¹ The miracle of the healing of the deaf-mute? Yes, a stuttering deaf person is found in Mk 7:31; yes, a blind mute in Mt 12:22. The only association with a deaf mute is in Mk 9:25 in the recovery of a demonic epileptic.

² The *chair of pestilence* was a favourite expression of the apologists of the XIX century to stigmatize academic teaching. Fr. d'Alzon, who was a journalist in his day and encouraged the vocation of the Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly in the apostolate of press, was not very kind towards this profession.

March 15

Selflessness, the fruit of divine hope

The ambition of all the saints was to do everything for God. But lots of souls will never become saints because they surrender to the appalling hypocrisy of disguising their human hopes with a divine veneer.

The Holy Spirit reminds us: *Beatus vir qui post aurum non abiit.*¹ The “gold” to which the Spirit refers, which he tells us not to seek after, refers to whatever attaches our heart to earthly things.

The Spirit of the Assumption is, first and foremost, one of disinterestedness, selflessness. Woe to whoever seeks for anything except God. Happy the one who appreciates with all his being the loyalty of selflessness! It is a question of poverty, but, even on a higher plane, one is called to disdain any wealth that does not flow from the heart of Jesus Christ, any treasure that is not divine, and any reward that is not God Himself.

The virtue of hope,

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 712)

¹ Sir 31:8: *"Blessed are the rich that do not run after gold.*

March 16

From good will to a good and firm will

Supernatural virtue is composed of two elements: God's grace and the cooperation of the human will. This cooperation calls forth the human will. Because of the need to fight against what has fallen, it requires effort.

It consists in combating: 1° the spirit of independence, 2° stubbornness, 3° fickleness, 4° caprice, 5° weakness, 6° stubborn habits.

What is needed to oppose all this is: 1° energy, 2° seriousness, 3° simplicity, 4° straightforwardness.

Notes for a talk during the 29th conference

given to the Religious of the Assumption

at the Priory of Nîmes, 1870-1871

(T.D., vol. 42, p. 278)

From November 5, 1870 to March 20, 1871, in Nîmes, Fr. d'Alzon gave to the Religious of the Assumption no less than 53 spiritual conferences on the spirit and virtues of the Assumption. Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus who, by way of precaution, had left Paris in flames at that time, was present for them with the novitiate which had taken temporary shelter in the South of France. A number of these conferences were published for the first time in the magazine of the Bonne Presse at the time, known as *Priest and Apostle*, from 1927 to 1930.

March 17

A Transfusion of prayer as a remedy for the aridity of pride

It seems to me that Our Lord told me to remind you again what you are, and, while returning from the feast yesterday, I reflected on this stanza of our Divine Office: *Ecce sedes hic Tonantis, Ecce coeli janua, Hic sacerdos, ara, templum, Hic Deus fit hostia*

.¹ I was applying these words to you, and in my heart I saw a throne for God, the gateway to heaven for your pupils, a priest, an altar, a temple for Jesus Christ who can come and make himself a victim there, in order that we might become a victim with him. Here, my dear child, is something of what I thought about in your regard. I am not saying it well at all; what I am not able to do, it seems to me, is to express to you the desire that poured forth in some way from my heart with such plenitude at the feet of our Divine Master, to obtain from him that you place your soul before Our Lord like a flower before the sun. Oh! If only my prayer could carry a drop of dew to this dear small plant and prevent it from drying up in the wind of pride!

A Letter to Sister Marie-Augustine Bévier

(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 150)

¹ From the office of the feast of the Dedication of Saint John Lateran. "Behold this is the seat of thunder. Behold the gateway to heaven. This priest, this altar, this temple God has made into a sin-offering."

March 18

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem,

Bishop and Doctor of the Church

(Faith in the divinity of Christ)

Jesus Christ – Second Person of the Blessed Trinity – God made Man – equal in all things to the Father – proves his divine power by giving us the Holy Eucharist.

God the Father proved his power by creating the universe, and creating man. Later on he went a step further – he manifested both his power and his love by giving us his only-begotten Son in the mystery of the Incarnation.

God the Son goes a step further still. This human nature, to which by his Father's decree he became hypostatically united, does not seem to satisfy his burning love for us. He goes so far as to confine himself under the appearance of a little bread. He conceals himself to the point of being contained within the limits of lifeless matter, which we call the host.

God the Father, in creating man, had this Perfect Man in view whom we honour and worship as Our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ completes the work of his Heavenly Father by becoming, in a sense, the creation of his creatures. He bestows upon some of these creatures –who came forth from nothingness because of him and with him in view – the power to create, and they are to exercise this power by creating Him, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity!

A sermon for Lent, 1862,

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 979-980)

Saint Cyril, Patriarch of Jerusalem and Doctor of the Church, had to fight the Arians who denied Christ's divinity. His instructions on Christian doctrine, addressed to catechumens, are pearls of theological literature.

March 19

Saint Joseph, spouse of the Virgin Mary,

a model of love for children

As for your plan to write a book on education, I find it is an excellent idea, and you are right that I did not remain a schoolmaster for eight years without wondering if I could not, I as well, write a

book thereon. However, I was told that you know things of similar matters which I don't know. Likewise, you yourself are unaware of some small thing that, by chance, I know from my time with children, in the midst of whom I spent my life, always loving them more as dear small children of God, and who represent to me the small divine infant, as he grew in grace and wisdom in the land of Nazareth,¹ in the company of his mother and the Eminent Saint Joseph. I would like to resemble him who, having carried the child Jesus in his arms, deserved to have Jesus do the same for him when he became old and had to leave for heaven.

Letter to Henri Gouraud

(Letters, vol. I, p. 232)

¹ Lk 2:52.

Henri Gouraud is a physician and French writer, a friend from youth of Fr. d'Alzon, who helped many of the Religious of the Assumption in Paris and also devoted himself to the Collège Stanislas. He would have liked to attract Fr. d'Alzon there but he could not persuade him. The physician's beautiful sister, a Sister of the Sacred Heart, Marie-Pauline Perdrau, is the author of the famous painting of the Virgin, Mater Admirabilis, situated inside the convent adjoining the church of the Trinity of the Hills in Rome. A replica decorates the cloister of the priory of Layrac that, in XIX century, was a convent of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. This religious sister is buried in the cemetery of Layrac.

March 20

In order to create new foundations, take the time to cultivate solid workers

I will tell you that anyone who leaves a congregation, after having spent three years there, does not seem to be good material for a new congregation... I believe that it is better to wait. This is not a reason to get discouraged, but it is important to have good elements, especially at the beginning. I ask you for a thousand pardons for the pain that I caused you, but you understand the importance of having at the beginning very solid and firm stones to support, one day, the walls of our small building. Here, we are not doing too badly, thanks be to God, but we still have very few religious. Let's hope that God will send them to us when the time comes, if we do not make ourselves too unworthy of them.

Letter to Sister Theresa-Emmanuel O'Neill

(Letters, vol. I, p. 129-130)

Sister Theresa-Emmanuel, of Irish origin and English citizenship, was one of the first

companions of Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus who made her a partner with her talents and virtues in the foundation of the Sisters. Of mystical temperament, she left her mark on the first generations of religious as Novice Mistress. She was chosen by Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus to found the second mission in England, at Richmond. She had an acute awareness of the necessity to encourage native vocations very quickly in the different mission lands of the Assumption and did not spare her efforts to discern English-speaking candidates for the family of Fr. d'Alzon.

March 21

A Spiritual acrostic from the name Emmanuel, in view of correcting his shortcomings

God sees your desires and that is enough. But what is important is that you set about correcting your shortcomings. Here is an acrostic I made for myself:

Esprit: Spirit of faith,

Mortification of the senses,

Mortification of the heart,

Amour: Love of God and neighbour,

Nonchalance overcome,

Usefulness of watching my tongue,

Etude: Study and manual work,

Lecture: Reading with the supernatural desire to benefit from it.

What's your reaction to all this?

Letter to Sister Marie de la Croix Aubert

(Letters, vol. IX, p. 474)

The season of Lent invites us to make a spiritual effort; the example above might inspire a similar personalised acrostic exercise using one's first name or last name.

March 22

A request for the grace to do interior work

(reforming one's character)

What temperament is to my body, character is to my soul. It is a nobler enemy, but stronger. Its superiority increases the danger of assault. Where has my character not taken me? As far as it is influenced by time, it acquires stiffness and demands; it becomes decadent, it decomposes itself in a way as to make me suffer and make others suffer.

My God, bend my character to your will, and may all its shortcomings be transformed by the grace of the one whom the Apostle calls the character, the form of your being.¹ By imitating your Son I engrave within myself that by which I will resemble you in my nothingness, and in this way may my character become an image of your perfection.

Meditation: Fighting against oneself,

Meditations on Religious Perfection,

vol. I, BP., p. 109-110

¹ An implicit reference to Heb 1:3: "*Christ is the radiance of the Father's glory and a reflection of his being.*"

March 23

On Christian love of neighbour

I must love my neighbour as myself for the love of God. We must study, therefore, how much God loves souls. 1° He created them in his likeness to converse with them in earthly paradise if they had remained in their original justice, and then to establish them in an eternity of happiness. 2° The first man, having violated his vocation, brought sin into the world; death came also, but a God loved the world enough to give his Son, so that by the death of this Son, God-made-man, the world was saved. *Sic Deus dilexit.*¹ 3° He made himself our food so that, sustained by such a food, we can overcome all obstacles that come between heaven and us.

He founded his Church in order to unite the elect. He accepted that his saints be persecuted by the wicked. He accepted all kinds of abuse, and all for love of us... Lord Jesus, make me bear witness of my love for you and may I pay my debts to you in such a manner that, in union with you, I will devote myself to the work of the sanctification of souls.

Meditation: Relations with our neighbour,

Meditations on Religious Perfection,

vol. I, BP., p. 125-126.

¹ | Jn 4:11

March 24

Palm Sunday.□ Entering into Holy Week

Let us enter the great week of our redemption; let us enter with palms in hand; it is the week of triumph. A triumph of light over darkness, of truth over falsehood, of suffering over guilty pleasure, of sacrifice over selfishness, of humility over pride, of obedience over rebellion, of life over death, of heaven over hell, and of God over Satan.

But remember that in this astonishing fight, Jesus Christ, the true David, leaves Goliath with his powerful weapons, and uses only the sling to strike him on the forehead and reverse death.¹ Goliath is defeated, frightened Israel is the victor, without hardly the time to doubt, so quick and unexpected was the blow. Satan has his weapons, Jesus Christ has his. Satan has riches, knowledge, passions, hatred, rebellion; Jesus Christ has selflessness, suffering, the ear-splitting cry of prayer, and love: he loves these men, his disciples, to the end, *in finem dilexit eos*,² and he goes to Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, to the shouts of the crowds who proclaim his victory over death at the tomb of Lazarus, until they themselves put him to death.

Le Pèlerin, April 13, 1878, p. 240

¹ I Sam. 17:32-54.

² Jn 13:1: *"He loved them to the end"*.

March 25

The Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord

I contemplate the mystery of a God being fashioned in Mary's chaste womb and I try to penetrate this mystery and discover what is applicable to me. For that, I focus on three operative sentences spoken on this wonderful occasion.

The word of the angel to Mary: *Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te, et virtus Altissimi obumbravit tibi*

The word of Mary: *Ecce Domini ancilla, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.*

The word of the Holy Spirit: *Et Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis.*¹

These three sentences are so important that the Church has enshrined them in the "Angelus," to be recited three times a day.

1° God the Holy Spirit taking the initiative on behalf of the Three Divine Persons.

2° The consent of the creature to the plan of the Creator

3° The result of a human will co-operating with the will of God.

Retreat on knowing Jesus Christ,

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 883-884)

¹ According to the narrative of the Annunciation, Lk 1:26-38, and John's Prologue, Jn 1:14: "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word. And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.*"

March 26

The sign of the fullness of love, the washing of the feet

Jesus sees the hands of Judas soiled with the pieces of silver that he received for selling him, and still he washes his feet. Here is how far he goes in humbling himself, and why he wants to repair through his humiliation the injury to his Father that our pride constantly produces. Human pride constantly rises up against the majesty of God; the humility of a God that leads him to lower himself before the taintedness of man. So Satan, who uses our pride to insult the divine power ever more, is confounded by divine abasement.

And in this humility, what love! Why wonder at the fact that he pours water into a basin to wash the feet of his disciples, he who will pour out all of his blood on the earth to cleanse all sinners? Thus, according to the thought of Saint Augustine, our Doctor, "*all of his Passion is but a long purification*"^{.1}

Meditation on the Passion,

Meditations on Religious Perfection, vol. I,

BP., p. 292-293

¹ Commentaries on the Gospel of John, treatise LV:7

March 27

Jesus, alone in the Garden of Olives

Jesus knows that the hour approaches, and he accepts it all, not that, if he had wanted, he could not have escaped. He could have slipped off into the desert during the night; but his hour had come, and, although aware of the desertion, he wants the sacrifice to be accomplished. Of the twelve apostles, one is absent, gone to betray him, eight remain in the valley, three come with him until the end, and they will fall asleep. What a group of consolers! And Jesus agrees to remain alone in this terrifying moment when all the horrors of the Passion will, in anticipation, pass before his eyes. Here is a model of the way in which I must accept the acts of Providence.

Oh Jesus, teach me; it is from your example that I learn not to rely on men. What a lesson! May your abandonment remove from me the right to self-pity when I find myself alone.

Meditation on the Passion,

Meditations on Religious Perfection,

Vol. 1, BP., pp. 295-296

March 28

A good spiritual use of illnesses

I have learned that you are bearing your illness with great patience (something which made me happy to hear). How important it is to pay great attention to this. An illness which is borne well is one of the most precious crises through which a soul can pass. It learns from such an experience about the emptiness of life and of all human strength before the power of God. At times it becomes more sensitive to the action of grace, and if it knew how to preserve the fruits, its storehouse would be doubled when health returns. If it does not make you too tired, think about your friends, pray for me. I am facing a period of tribulation. It is not anything too great, but because I am weak, I shout even before I get a scratch, as if I had skin torn off. Yet, it is necessary to bear the weight of all these pains, and this is what I want to do with all my heart, as long as God still gives me strength.

A Letter to Sister Theresa-Emmanuel O'Neill

(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 209)

March 29

Christ's Passion (Holy Thursday: celebration of the Last Supper)

Jesus celebrates the Passover with his disciples. *Ante diem festum Paschae, Jesus sciens quia venit hora ejus ut transeat ex hoc mundo ad patrem, cum dilexisset suos qui erant in mundo, in finem dilexit eos.*¹

At the beginning of this series of instructions on the sorrowful mysteries of the Saviour, let us examine the goal behind it, which lessons we can draw from our first glance over the Passion of our Master. Jesus wants to celebrate a final Passover with his apostles. What does Passover mean? Passage. It is indeed a great and solemn passage that he accomplishes, since it reveals to us Christ's mission on earth, since it shows us his goal. So the Saviour's last Passover, 1° presents us Jesus Christ as he prepares to complete his passage on earth, 2° teaches us to accomplish ours from earth to heaven.

What drives him? Love. A love that had been prepared by means of figures. Love had led him, had led him from heaven to earth. Love had given him a body. Love had made him man. Love will make him a man of sorrows. Love leads him to institute a summary of his marvels. Love will bring him to death. Love will place the wood of sacrifice on his shoulders. Love will bring him death by nailing him to the cross.

Sermon on the Passion

(T.D., vol 44, p. 186)

¹ Jn 13:1 "On the day before the Passover, knowing that his hour had come, Jesus, already having loved those who were his own in the world, loved them to the end."

March 30

The meaning of the Cross (Good Friday: Jesus on the cross)

*Judaei signa petunt.*¹ Two trees, the tree of knowledge in paradise and the tree of life in the heavenly Jerusalem. Between the two is the tree of the cross. I have come to teach you what it is the cross became through Jesus Christ: in relation to his Father, an altar; against Satan, a weapon of triumph; for us, a pledge of reconciliation; for heaven, a sign of peace.

For God, an altar. Justice is upset; sacrifices figurative. *Impossibile est sanguine hircorum aut vitulorum auferri peccata.*² This same Jesus, who descended to earth, will present himself both as pontiff and as victim, and he will be stretched out on the tree of the cross. There, through his sorrow, he will atone for the sins of man, the Father will be satisfied, justice appeased, and mercy victorious.

Satan is defeated and so is his empire that spreads from one end of the world to the other. Jesus came to fight against him, to strike him down and take the sceptre from him. The reign of Jesus over paganism is established, the empire of evil and the empire of hell destroyed. For humankind, the cross is a pledge of peace, a new covenant. Christ pours out his blood, he is the victim. God makes a covenant [with three partners]: the Father, the Son and humankind.

Notes from a sermon on the Cross

(T.D., vol. 44, p. 16)

¹ 1 Cor 1:22 *"The Jews ask for signs."*

² An approximate quote from Heb 9:12: *'Christ entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and young bulls, but with his own blood...'*

March 31

Office of Tenebrae (Holy Week in Rome, 1834)

You are surprised, I am sure, that two pages of a letter from Rome, dated Holy Saturday, do not contain a word about Holy Week. This is why. It is what I saw at the beginning that discouraged me from seeing the end. On Holy Wednesday I went to Tenebrae in the Sistine Chapel. Not being a musician, I can say that the Lamentations and the Miserere were beautiful, but the whole affair was a scandal. I was next to people who kept talking, and, although the Blessed Sacrament was not present in the chapel, I was really upset to find myself in the midst of people who considered the Office to be a spectacle. I did not go back there again. On Holy Thursday, I visited some superb churches. Tomorrow, I will go to Saint Peter's, because it is possible to find a good place there and it is not too noisy. Holy Week in Rome is the most beautiful thing that one can see when one is resolved to spend it as an amateur, but in that case I do not know how much one can really take in, because without faith the ceremonies are only a comedy.

Letter to Henri d'Alzon

(Letters, vol. A, p. 533)

THE

MONTH

OF

APRIL

The month of April, as winter takes its leave, prepares the way for spring (at least in the northern hemisphere where d'Alzon lived). It is the season which is the honor of woods and of months ("des bois et des mois"), as Rémi Belleau reminds us in song. In the liturgical calendar, April is usually the month in which Easter and the Resurrection fall. The cycle of saints also presents various celebrations: St. John-Baptist de La Salle (4/7), the Conversion of St. Augustine (4/24), St. Mark (4/25), St. Turibius of Mogrovejo (4/27), St. Peter Chanel (4/28), and St. Catherine of Siena (4/29), among so many others who have made the pilgrimage from earth to heaven, from death to resurrection. Never do the saints become simply luminaries of the past, men and women of yesteryear. They are always men and women of tomorrow, witnesses of a future world, as John Paul II recalled in Lisieux on June 2, 1980. They color with their sanctified humanity this march of time which the Easter liturgy fills with its springtime aroma. May this verdant splendor walk hand in hand with our happiness for the One who rises to the heavenly Jerusalem, on the day of the Ascension (4/31).

April 1

The holy day of Easter, the Resurrection of the Lord

*Surrexit, non est hic.*¹ What an epitaph for a tomb, as Bourdaloue observed, and what power in the one who sends an angel to bear this message! No one had ever announced his own resurrection before. Jesus Christ said: "I will rise again," and he rose again, and it was after having triumphed over death that he came to destroy it. *Oh death,*
*where is your sting?*²

The Saviour had said to Martha some days before:

>I am the resurrection and the life',³

and I will rise again to prove that those who believe in me will live for ever. However, this mystery of the death and resurrection of the Saviour is the perpetual teaching of Jesus, who must die every day in exile in order to live without end in his homeland. As long as we do not strip ourselves of our vices, of our concupiscence, we cannot hope for true life. Death, strictly speaking, is sin; as long as we remain in sin, we remain in death, because we are in opposition to the one who is life. Let us make the effort, therefore, and rise from our sin as from a tomb, for in this is the resurrection of our soul.

Le Pèlerin, April 20, 1878, p. 257

¹ *He is risen, he is not here:* Mt 28:6, Mk 16:6 and Lk 24:6

² I Cor 15:55

³ Jn 11:25-26

April 2

The apostolic grandeur of the holy women of faith

Two days ago I returned from a pilgrimage to the Saint Marys. Why does God allow these women to be thrown on this shore: helpless, without direction, without apostolic activity – these women who were his companions on his apostolic journeys, who remained his friends during the ignominies on Calvary, who, with St. John and the Blessed Virgin, almost by themselves formed the core of the Church when Jesus Christ breathed his last,¹ he whose love survived death, these women who were the first to learn of the Resurrection? Why this desertion? Why this obvious severity by the Divine Saviour? Saint Martha evangelized Tarascon, Saint Madeleine is the companion of angels, tradition only gives to two Saint Marys the beaches, the sea and an unhealthy climate. When one of them came to die, what happened in the soul of the one who survived? What a test in this abandonment, what merit in what appeared to be senseless suffering? One of them brought the head of her son, Saint James, the first apostle to be tortured; the other had nothing other than her memories of the cross and the resurrection. It was sufficient for both. May faith be sufficient for you, my very dear child, and help you spread your wings out towards heaven!

Letter to Mrs. de La Prade

(Letters, vol. III, p. 447)

¹ From Lk 23:49 or 24:10. April 2, 2005 is the anniversary of the death of Pope John Paul II.

April 3

A community on the road to resurrection

I believe very strongly in the future of the house of Bordeaux, and if Sedan must fall, I would be delighted to have Sister Mary of the Blessed Sacrament closer to me. Your small priory in Nîmes is going really well. Sister M.-Gabrielle is indeed a very good religious, Sister M.-Julienne also; Sister Mary of the Cross seems to me to have come out the clouds; Sister M.-Genevieve seems not to be the same person so much has she been transformed in goodness; Sister M.-Elisabeth is not too foolish, Sister M. Chantal is on her feet again and I think she will be able to do something. Sister M.-Augustine is trying to figure out if she is really obedient; she no longer runs after me, and now I am the one who has to ask her what delights her. I find the simplicity, the peace and the holiness of Sister Françoise-Eugénie more charming every day. A final word: God wants all this to last!

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus

(Letters, vol. I, p. 431)

Bordeaux (1860), Sedan (1854) and Nîmes (1855) formed three R.A communities at that time in France. Fr. d'Alzon knows the members of these three communities which he visited personally and where he preached days of retreat. He is, on the other hand, the ecclesiastical superior of the R.A community in Nîmes under the direction of Sister François-Eugénie de Malbosc, very much appreciated by both Fr. d'Alzon and the future Bishop of Montpellier, Most Rev. Cabrières.

April 4

Genuine frankness undermines neither confidence nor friendship

I also believe that you are mistaken about what could have led me to believe that there is a new trend among the Religious of the Assumption. It was not about me, it was about you. That a few bad apples have spread baseless complaints, who would deny it? That, in addition to them, others sometimes speak well-intentionally, though sadly, yes, yes, yes.

Given the affection I have for your work, I read between the lines of what people are saying. I sensed something in their hints, in the inflection of their voice, and in certain hesitations. When you are aware of what is happening and are determined not to believe only the accusations that have been made, you catch these sorrows, these clouds, these surprises, as it were, on the fly. And if you experience these things with several people, you begin to say to yourself: perhaps there is something to them.

You seem to have forgotten the observations I confided to you. Now, how is it that after I had pointed this out to Fr. Picard one, two, three, even four years ago, he completely agreed with me? He even assured me that you shared this opinion.

So what was involved? A lot of nothings that nevertheless amounted to something when put together: something less intense at the novitiate, smaller thinking on the part of those in charge; Fr. Mas finds, without our having discussed it, something less practical and more mystical, too little softening of characters, maybe more piety – not to say devotion – but less spirit of faith, and feelings of sadness over the fact that, one after the other, the Sisters were successively considered as prodigies worthy of your complete confidence, then rejected as rubbish. You would scream if I told you who confessed these things to me.

As for me, (because I don't want to talk any more about the other question), I must admit that I got this impression especially during your last trip. Perhaps I have a twisted mind, but one of your conversations led me to draw this conclusion which, I believe, is well-founded. If you can assure me that I was mistaken, let me to tell you that I will be very happy to believe it.

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jésus

(Letters, vol. VII, pp. 105-106)

Questions of opinions and interpretations are always delicate in relationships. Fr. d'Alzon and Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus always had the gift of explaining themselves honestly on misunderstandings, grievances or obvious divergences concerning the spirit of the Assumption, its origins and its evolution.

April 5

The Power of resurrection

The traveler who contemplates, in passing, the half-destroyed monuments of man's vanity and who sits in the middle of ruined temples, amphitheatres, or previously populated palaces, that today are silent and desolate, fills them once again in his imagination with inhabitants and sounds. And when he has meditated for a moment on what is no longer there, he moves on; all that remains of his faded memories is sadness and the feeling of man's emptiness. I want you to visit something similar but much more consoling. Note the ruins of humanity; contemplate the sublime, still smoking, ruins of avenging thunderbolts. Well! It will not be the spirit of man but God's spirit which does not raise them up in a dream world, but in reality. Come and see.

Notes on the Spirit of God,

from T.D., vol. 48, p. 147-148

April 6

A small novitiate arranged for someone who is ill,

but in the hands of God

Notice, my dear girl, that I do not ask more than that you make a novitiate at once. As soon as you are in Nîmes, we will begin if you wish. We will remove all its austerity; we will include only what concerns interior perfection. Do you want this? Personally, I have the conviction that you will be a perfect Sister, as soon as you no longer want to order people to make you practice obedience as you understand it. I add that you must put yourself entirely into the hands of God, whether you are feeling great or not, that God knows well enough what he can draw out of someone who is ill.

I announced to the girls from Bulgaria their departure for Nîmes; they are thrilled and their satisfaction gives me the hope that they will do well. They will no longer be formed in one year

at Rochebelle. They have such open hearts, so much confidence, that it seems very difficult to me not to be able to make something from all this good will.

Letter to Ms Eulalie de Régis

(Letters, vol. III, p. 126-127)

April 7

Saint John Baptist de La Salle, educator

The city of Rouen intends to erect a statue to the venerable La Salle, founder of the Christian Brother schools. A committee was formed in the former capital of Normandy to collect the necessary funds to realize this noble plan. This homage, rendered to the man who has possibly best merited it of all the generations of young Frenchmen, is of obvious interest to all Catholics; and all should hasten to contribute by making a donation.

But today where teaching by Congregations is the object of violent attacks, it seemed good to invite all your parishioners to make a donation, and to recommend a very modest sum of five cents per person: it is a way of protesting against Revolutionary teaching. Who would refuse to give such a small sum to an effort which is so French and so Catholic?

Letter to the Parish Priests of the Diocese of Nîmes

(Letters, vol. X, p. 48)

April 8

The Joy of a vocation

And if you have already in your heart replied: “Yes, it is” – then begin by singing this “going up”

psalm: "I rejoiced when I heard them say. Let us go up to God's house today": ¹ *Laetatus sum in his quae dicta sunt mihi: in domum Domini ibimus;*

You must be thrilled through and through with a tremendous joy at the thought of God's house being your house too. Like Abraham you are leaving your homeland and saying good-bye to your family. Never mind the heart-break - think of the joy. You have chosen God for your inheritance. You are not only drawn, but lifted up in the arms of love. Not only has God loved you from all eternity, but you yourself long to render love for love, to such a tender Father, to such a loving spouse. So you jump for joy, and you cry out in ecstasy: "I was glad when I heard them say. Let us go up to God's house today."

Laetatus sum in his quae dicta sunt mihi: in domum Domini ibimus.

Fifth Meditation,

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 349)

April 9

Growth in charity

See how charity takes shape, grows, develops and produces its fruit. It can be compared to some magnificent tree. God the Holy Spirit plants it where he will. He drops its seed into that fertile ground which is the heart of man. It lies there – then if the soil is well prepared, it begins to appear on the surface. But the hand of God does even more. With due respect for human will and liberty, the love of God caresses the newly born plant like the rays of the sun caress the

flowers in our garden. It begins to take shape – it begins to grow. God's influence becomes more effective, the more we listen to His voice... .. and it is thus, as Saint Paul writes to the Romans (Rom 5:5), that “the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” *Caritas Dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per Spiritum sanctum qui datus est.*

Thirteenth Meditation,

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 412)

April 10

Unity of the faith in the growth of the Church

Our Lord tells us that at the end of time there will be *Unum ovile et unus pastor*.¹ This is the outcome for which we labour. One of the glories of Pius IX's Pontificate, which unfortunately is

seldom mentioned, is that never in the Church's history, since earliest times, have there been so many foreign missions as today. Pope Pius IX has already established more than 170 new dioceses. And while whole peoples who have never known the Church are hastening to gather into its fold, Catholics everywhere are converging on their common centre. See them gathering tightly round the Holy See. Had it been asked twenty five years ago which dogma of Faith was first on the list for proclamation, the answer would have been: that of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception. Today it is evident that the first item on the agenda for the coming Council is papal infallibility. Everyone believes it - everyone proclaims it - nobody nowadays would dare sustain the contrary. The most that could be said against defining it would be its importunity - that the time is not ripe. Surely it is up to the Holy Father himself to decide whether the time is ripe or not. At the Council of Nicea (A.D.325) which 300 bishops attended, only six of them refused to sign the Creed declaring God the Son to be consubstantial with God the Father. Today there will be two dozen or less among the 1200 Catholic bishops of the world who will refuse to subscribe to the Pope's infallibility.

On the Spirit the Assumption,

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 704)

¹ Jn 10:16 "but one flock and one shepherd."

April 11

Have the soul of a servant

It is not good enough to elaborate beautiful theories about how things ought to be. We must “get down to brass tacks”, and the “brass tacks” of community life are services requested and rendered. Living together as we do, we are constantly asking for help, and constantly being asked for help. Who likes to be disturbed? Who likes to be inconvenienced? Yet, what did Our Lord do other than accept perpetual inconvenience from Bethlehem to Calvary. And look at his patience in the Blessed Sacrament! What stupendous miracles did he not perform, and does he not continue to perform, to remind us that to be good, as he is good, entails rendering one service after another, no matter what the cost? So there is your model. Who has ever been half as good as Jesus Christ? – and who has rendered, and continues to render, half the service he does? When you have done half as much to help your fellow-men as He has to help you – then you can begin to complain. Meanwhile hang your head in shame. Coldness, selfishness, looking after “number one” and not wishing to be bothered – is there anything more diametrically opposed to what Our Saviour stands for?

Thirty-first Meditation,

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 574-575)

April 12

The Spirit in our hearts

It is the Holy Spirit who must himself pray in us, *postulat in nobis gemitibus inenarrabilibus*.¹ We do not give enough thought to the truth that we possess him: by Baptism, by Confirmation and by Ordination. We are his temples, his shrines (I Cor. 6:19) – so let us adore this God who lives inside each one of us. He is entirely at our disposal. He will make us more and more aware of his presence, as we get to love him more and more – as we open wider and wider our gates to welcome him in. Saint Augustine points out

Cum igitur ubique est non in omnibus habitat, etiam in quibus habitat non aequaliter habitat....quamvis in quibus habitat; habeant eum pro suae capacitatis diversitate, alli amplius, alii minus, quos sibi dilectissimum templum gratia suae bonitatis aedificat

²

Second Circular on prayer,

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 295-296)

¹ Rom 8: 26 “The Spiritprays within us, using words no tongue can utter.”

² Letter 187 of Saint Augustine, 17 and 19, Latin Patrology 33, 838-839 “Although God is everywhere, he doesn’t live in everybody – and in those in whom he does live, he doesn’t live to an equal extent. He lives entirely in them all – yet those in whom he lives possess him according to their individual capacity: some more, some less, but all by his infinite goodness called to become his holy temples.”

April 13

Hope

Hope is a virtue by which we have a firm trust, founded on the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that we shall possess God for all eternity, provided we make full use of the graces he gives us in this life. We shall therefore place our whole confidence in God alone, never in any created thing. Evangelical poverty will be the external proof of the practice of our hope, from which we shall draw the true spirit of humility, with its distrust and contempt of self. Hope will give us the spirit of prayer, leading us to ask for the grace necessary to observe the law of God and His counsels, convinced as we are that whatever is not of God and is not related to God is not worthy of us. Hope practiced like this will inspire in us the deepest recognition of the gifts of God. We shall always remember the words of the apostle who recommends that we give thanks for everything that happens to us: *In omnibus gratias agentes*.¹

The Directory, II, 4 "Hope"

¹ Eph 5: 20. "In all things give thanks."

April 14

A supernatural, audacious and selfless love

What shall I say about our love for the Church? The Church is something so wonderful, that the pens of even our most inspired authors seem hopelessly inadequate to express its greatness, its richness, its power, its beauty and its glory. Listen to them telling us that the Church is the dwelling place of God among men (Rev 21:3) – the pillar and the unshakeable foundation of eternal truth (I Cor 3:10) – the Mystical Body of Christ which brings him to completion (Eph 4:12; Col 1:18). The Church is his perfect bride, holy and spotless (Eph 5:27; Rev 19:7). For her sake the Son of God came down from heaven and united himself to humanity. Hers are the tents to be blessed and multiplied (Nb 24:5). She is the beloved city. She is the army with which he will rout his enemies (Ex 17:9). Beautiful words written about, and applied to, the Church – but her most touching title is that of Bride: the object of his predilection, the recipient of the Divine Bridegroom's most jealous love. So we love the Church because Jesus Christ loved her. And our love for the Church must have these three characteristics: it must be supernatural – it must be daring– and it must be unselfish.

Instruction to the Chapter of 1868,

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 135-136)

April 15

Apostolic priorities for the Assumption

Preaching, teaching, spiritual direction, and works of charity: let these be our principal activities. Combine them in such a way as to achieve the final results we have set for ourselves. We must march as an army, owing its strength to its unity of command – an army which would surely be defeated were each of its soldiers to fight as he fancied. May the beauty of God's Kingdom enrapture you! Why was the world created, if not for the Kingdom of God? Why did God the Son become Man, if not to restore the ruins of this Kingdom which had been devastated by the power of Satan? A mystery, no doubt – a mystery we will never fathom. But a mystery full of divine excitement for those who have learnt to despise passing things – for those whose ambitions tend towards what is infinite, what is perfect, what will last for ever.

Second Letter to the Master of Novices,

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 158-159)

April 16

A global apostolic ambition¹

I haven't yet mentioned our foreign missions. Australia will have to be put to side for the time being, because certain contractual obligations which were made have not yet been kept. But we are doing great work in Bulgaria. We have launched an Association of Employers and Apprentices and opened a school for two hundred boys. Both have had lasting success. Our Oblate Sisters have most effectively backed us up by opening a hospital, a dispensary, a boarding school and several primary schools. This is only a beginning. We have secured a valuable bridgehead against the Greek and Russian schism. We will be accused of fool-hardy ambition. How puny we are compared to the giant we are attacking. The Church has three great enemies today: the Revolution, the Prussian Eagle and the Russian Bear. Of these three Russia is not the least redoubtable. Yet, what an immense field of endeavour it is for us! As Our Lord said to his timorous disciples, so I dare say to you: *Massis multa.*² These disciples became Apostles and conquered the world. Decide, my brothers, whether you want to conquer Russia and bring its vast harvest into the granary of your Father. It makes me tremble to speak to you thus -- yet something tells me the Assumption can do it, and with God's help this harvest will be gathered in.

Instruction for the Chapter of 1873,

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 185-186)

¹ The apostolic report addressed here by Fr. d'Alzon is the one of 1873. Since that time the Assumption has continued to explore new apostolic fields, depending on needs, interests, and our abilities.

² Mt 9:37 or LK 10:2 "The harvest is great.

April 17

The work of vocations, the alumniate movement

We will welcome in our alumnates, from earliest youth, all those youngsters whom our efforts and the charity of the faithful will allow us. How numerous these good young boys would be if our available funds kept pace with the present number of vocations! Counting on Divine Providence, we have already begun... and see how God has blessed us. Our initial success is a clear indication that he wishes us to continue. So continue we will... and we will welcome whoever knocks on our door and seeks admission, however old he is and wherever he comes from. We will welcome those who, before coming to us, knew how it felt to enjoy life. Some will have enjoyed it to their cost – some will have experienced storms – some (alas') shipwreck... but we will welcome them all into the House of Probation together with those angelic little brothers who chose not to sully their baptismal robes in the slime of sinfulness so as not to have to wash them in a fount of penitent tears.

Instruction for the Chapter of 1873

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 187)

The term *alumnate* is a neologism formed from Latin (*aleo*, to feed, and *alumnus* infant) to designate a small seminary at the Assumption, in the style of the apostolic schools of religious communities, with its own characteristics (situated in the country, formation in Greek and Latin, a family spirit, combination of manual work and intellectual work, an early initiation into religious life).

April 18

Quality rather than quantity

God alone probes the depth of the human heart. But there are times –for example when the general welfare of the Congregation is at stake – when charity itself obliges us to pass judgment on our brothers. And there can be no doubt as to our primary obligation of promoting an ever more intense and effective fervour for our own sake, for that of our brothers, and for that of the souls entrusted to our care. The preservation and growth of fervour depends above all on those whom we place in charge. So before admitting anybody to the Chapter we must bear in mind that it doesn't matter how numerous are, as long as these men themselves are living models of what a religious ought to be.

Second Circular,

The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 198-199)

April 19

The Third Orders of the Assumption

Let the Third Orders of Saint Dominic and Saint Francis... let the Company of Jesus itself, and every Order and pious association ever founded... pitch themselves into the fray, giving new life and new purpose to every one of their thousands of members... and let us warmly applaud whatever they do. But why should we be left out? Have we nothing to contribute? Have we no understanding of what God requires of us? What do we see around us today? A host of decent and well meaning citizens..... Do you not agree that a Third Order (or call it what you may) would be the answer? Assemble around you a group of intelligent laypeople. Think of what you could accomplish with their cooperation: propagating Christian ideas, preparing Catholic universities, organizing Catholic working class movements, protesting worldly ideas, fostering vocations I have been surveying the landscape from various standpoints. How are we to disseminate Christian ideas and attitudes? – How are we to bring about Christian social conditions? – How are we to encourage religious vocations? To all three queries it seems to

me that Third Orders offer an attractive answer. We already have a Third Order of women. Why not one for men? It would be equally advantageous. Its membership could consist of both priests and pious laymen – and it would bring greater fervour and greater austerity into their lives.

Third Circular,

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 204, 205, 206)

This circular letter was written in 1874 on the eve of the organization of Catholic Universities in France whose way had been prepared by the Laboulaye law on the freedom of higher education.

On Tuesday April 19, 2005 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was elected pope by the papal conclave; he took the name of Benedict XVI.

April 20

The lay apostolate

The world can be neither a major seminary nor a large convent; but by staying within their families with all the relations created by society, do Christians have nothing they can do? Will the heavenly flame not reach them? If the time of martyrs has passed, are Christians today not their heirs? If it is no longer necessary to confess the truth from the roof-tops, does there

remain nothing for the apostolate of the laity, to use the words that have come from the Vatican? And is not courage indispensable for all those who want, in the place given them by Providence, to become equally and energetically children of God and the Church? For me, I need to say this: nothing appears more beautiful, more magnificent to me than the life of the Christian, with his quiet and strong virtues, protesting against the damaging influences that invade us, illuminating the principles of his conduct with the splendour of faith, and showing, by his actions even more than by his words, the power of devotion and sacrifice, as they were practiced eighteen hundred years ago and preached on the summit of Calvary. And do not reproach us for presenting to our children examples of perfection that are too lofty. On the one hand, there are the heights that perfection inhabits, and on the other, the weaknesses; I would even say the natural cowardice of our children guarantees that the greatest number at least will never reach the same heights; and, after all, it is good to teach these young consciences that their true models are those who come closer to the eternal model of the humanity of Jesus Christ.

A Speech on the occasion of the distribution of awards,

August 16, 1858

April 21

An open mind and a narrow mind

The open mind seeks to see things in themselves; the narrow mind sees everything in relation to itself. Yet I have known people who always said that it was necessary to see things in depth, and who actually saw everything crooked; but these were false minds. The open mind devotes itself to a cause, the narrow mind is devoted to itself whatever the cause; the open mind endeavours to hover on the heights, while the narrow mind digs holes for moles and is quite happy to find shelter in a hole. Because the main goal of the narrow mind is not to commit itself, that's what it calls prudence. Prudence is, in fact, a virtue that helps in the governance of things and people for the general good. The prudence of the narrow mind never considers anything but its own affairs, its own person. The open mind is really quite useless without a strong and generous character; although such an open mind sees what needs to be done, it does nothing. The narrow mind with an energetic character does more harm than good, and at most makes a lot of noise about nothing. Such a one's character matches his mind; you can expect all kinds of stupidities, justified for the most ludicrous reasons, when they are not just plain silly.

Memories of an Elder in

L'Assomption of Nîmes, 1875, n° 14, p., 117

April 22

The cradle of faith

It is up to us never to lose heart. If they suppress our educational establishments, if they prevent us from teaching in the open, then let us go and teach underground, in the cellars and catacombs. *Verbum Dei non est alligatum (1)*. I remember visiting, just over a year ago, the crypt where Saint Peter used to baptize. There isn't much room down there, yet it is the birthplace of Roman faith. It's very dark down there, yet see what light issued from such obscurity! Light issued from the very depth of darkness, truth from all of these tombs – from these narrow passageways cluttered with the remains of early Christians, especially those under the reign of the emperor Claudius. It is from here, of all places, that Christian feet set out to carry the Good News to the ends of the Earth.

Nineteenth Meditation,

from The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 480)

¹ II Tim 2:9 "The Word of God cannot be held captive."

April 23

A new Diocesan Catechism.

(censure with mercy rather than flatter in error)

A few observations, as we consider the possibility of publishing a new manual of religious instruction, bring to mind a beautiful passage from St. Augustine. It occurs at the beginning of the second book of the treatise on the Trinity. Attacked by a crowd of critics who find it far easier to blame than to do something, he writes:¹ *I have no fear, he says, of exposing my thought, but I would much prefer it to be examined by the good than be chewed over by the perverse. Charity, in its beauty and its modesty, accepts with understanding the look of the dove, and as for the teeth of the dogs, the prudence of humility avoids them, or the strength of the truth will break them. I much prefer to be blamed by anyone than praised by a man who is mistaken or by a flatterer. A friend of the truth does not dread being censured; whether by a friend or by an enemy: if an enemy insults him he supports him; if a friend is mistaken he illuminates it, if he is in the truth, he listens to him. The praiser who errs is confirmed in his error. The flatterer is carried away by it. Therefore the just will correct me in his mercy and will pick me up again; as for the oil of the sinner, it will never embalm my head.*²

No more than David and St. Augustine, does the Bishop of Nîmes yearn for the unctuous praise of certain people.

The Assumption of Nîmes, 1877, n° 54, p. 244

April 24

The Feast of the conversion of Saint Augustine

For about two weeks I have become quite diligent. Every morning, from 5:30, I walk with a book in hand. I have read the Bible, Tertullian, the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine. The beautiful book of the *Confessio*
ns ! What a beautiful soul this man had! Yet, he was weak; he made his mistakes; but how he showed his regret! And then, his friendship for his friends! He speaks of it in a charming way. I spend time translating Tertullian; later, I translate some Dante: I have already nearly read the whole text of the *Inferno* with the help of a translation. Let me say, finally, that I have some really great plans for studying for an entire month or so. I am not going to say anything to you about politics. There is nothing drier than politics! Today I will say nothing about it. My letter, this time, will only note one fact: it is that I am tired of everything that I see and that I want to refresh my heart in opening it up a little to you. Take what I have told you as you wish, but when you only see foolishness there Bwhich I don't believe you will - so much is made of it today that it is permitted to say so. Farewell.

Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny,

August 31, 1830

(Letters, vol. A, p. 127-128)

April 25

Saint Mark, evangelist

The thesis appears to me to be this: has God revealed any truths outside of the Scriptures? Could he have done this? Why not! Before the Scriptures, before Jesus Christ? Yes. Since Jesus Christ? Evidently yes. The time between the Ascension and the first work, or rather between the Ascension and the complete body of the New Testament. Will you say that it was not necessary because the apostles were infallible? Ah! The apostles were infallible while teaching! Therefore men can be infallible, and others who were not apostles, Saint Mark and Saint Luke, for example. The question is decided then. What text states that Saint Luke and Saint Mark were infallible other than tradition? I am becoming a Protestant.

The Protestant Controversy (around 1854),

from T.D., vol. 47, p. 8 (D00988)

April 26

***Our Lady of Good Counsel*¹**

An old friend gave me this advice (old friends always give good advice): you will notice, he told me, that the conduct which is, above all, most clever is that of Christian simplicity. It is not because of cleverness that we must strive for greater simplicity, but because it is simplicity that God wants to reward. Saint Francis de Sales said: ¹ *One wants very little, and as one grows old, one wants them even less.*²

Someone told Cardinal Bellarmine who was very busy: ¹

*You have a lot to do.*² No,

he answered,

I only have one thing to do: attend to my salvation; the rest worries me very little.

Retreat to the Religious at Auteuil,

August 1860, E00077

¹ This feast normally prescribed for April 25 originated at the Shrine of Genazzano (40 km from Rome) in the second half of the XV century. An Augustinian tertiary widow, Petruccia, placed her goods at disposal for the enlargement and restoration of an old church. An image of the Virgin, honoured in Scutari in Albania, appeared to her on April 25, 1467. The title of Our Lady of Good Counsel was introduced to the litany of Our Lady by Pope Leo XIII.

April 27

Saint Turibius Alfonso of Mogrovejo,

a missionary bishop

Then there appeared these great religious whose strenuous labours had no other goal than to raise the standards of the Indians and make them capable of social and Christian life. I say the religious specially, because if you read the beautiful life of St. Turibius who was to Lima what St. Charles was to Milan, you will see that he needed to wage all kinds of battles to repulse the encroachment of the viceroys. It is hard to believe the venality of the magistrates, the laxity of the clergy, the ignorance of the Spaniards, the oppression of the Indians. Public worship was reduced to nothing, instruction abandoned. How can one teach people who only know how to engage in business? Under the action of a man of God, carried out for a quarter of century, civil abuses were eradicated, the priests educated, the Spaniards made more moral. The Indians returned from their forests and their caves and were able to settle back in their villages; religious

instruction raised them up and gave them a certain human dignity while baptism made them Christian.

Impressions of a journey, published in Le Pèlerin,

April 5, 1879, p. 220

Saint Turibius Alfonso of Mogrovejo (1538-1608), a Bishop of Spanish origin, Archbishop of Lima, was canonized in 1726.

April 27 is the national holiday of Togo. Let us pray for the Assumptionist community in Sokodé and for the people of Togo.

April 28

Saint Peter Chanel, a Marist priest, martyr

If a Bishop could proclaim recently that the tree of the French monarchy bathed its roots in the baptistery of Saint Rémi, it is still more truthful to say that the Church bathes its feet in the blood of her children, her priests, her bishops, and her sovereign pontiffs, immolated during the first

three centuries of her existence in the name of the laws at that time. Are you unaware that the victims of these laws are the object of special worship for her; that the altar, on which she renews the divine sacrifice every day, is necessarily the tomb of some of her martyrs; and that a Catholic priest never goes up to celebrate the holy mysteries, where these venerated relics rest without kissing the altar, so as to strengthen his lips with this sacred contact, to make them worthier to preach the truth and to free them from all terror, when he should announce the judgement of God in spite of legal opposition?

Letter to Minister Delangle

(Letters, vol. III, p. 440)

April 29

Saint Catherine of Siena, Doctor of the Church¹

The bout of illness that I had gave me a little time to rest and some time for myself; I took advantage of it to think about things and to resolve to give myself totally to God. Mr. Chavin, in his *Life of Saint Catherine of Siena*, where he speaks about everything, even of Saint Catherine, did me some good. Why are you not like this admirable virgin? Alas! Why, for my part, do I not have her generosity and her ardent love for the blood of Jesus Christ? As for me, what I love in Christ, it seems to me, is the whole of Jesus Christ, God and man, and, as God-Man, priest, sanctifier, and victim. Finally, my dear child, there isn't one good sentiment that I don't want to send you either that you might enjoy it at the same time as I do or that you might help me develop it. A service that I ask of you in return is to preach to me often about calmness, recollection, and solitude. Be for me the voice in the desert that draws me there.

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus

(Letters, vol. C, p. 193-194)

¹ The anniversary of the foundation of the Religious of the Assumption (1839)

April 30

First communion at Collège de l'Assomption

Yesterday, Sunday, we celebrated First Communion at the Collège de l'Assomption. One

characteristic of this feast struck us: it was the intimate part that family plays in the feast of the collège. There were two or three generations of pupils present. The older ones, having made their First Communion previously in this chapel, had come to accompany, at the sacred banquet, their younger brothers. Still older pupils saw their sons approaching this holy table where they had once upon a time received communion for the first time. The chivalrous love of the holy Roman Church, that distinguishes this house, was revealed in every detail. The ceremonies were carried out according to the rules of the Church, with great precision, in an orderly way and with gravity. Liturgical songs appear to be the only ones suitable. No other words than the words adopted by the Church; no other music than that of Saint Gregory. The recollection was unsurpassable. Gregorian chant is an aid to prayer; or better yet, it prays with us. The words of the Church, that the pupils of the collège must learn, are a lot more beautiful, more seriously devout and more touching than the French compositions by our best authors. After the Communion Mass, we were driven, with all the parents, to the gymnasium, where there was a table set with about a hundred place settings. We must pity all those to whom these joys of the soul are unknown!

The Assumption of Nîmes, 1877, n° 59, p. 281

April 30 (bis)

The Feast of the Ascension'

Jesus Christ completed his work. He was born in poverty; he grew up in obscurity, worked and was obedient; he preached for three years; then the fury of his enemies, reaching its height, delivered him to Gentiles; he was flogged, crowned with thorns, and crucified. He died, and on the third day, just as he had predicted, he rose again. He lived on the earth for forty days, appearing at times to his disciples. He addressed his last recommendations to them; he founded the ecclesiastical hierarchy on Peter and the apostles. He blessed them all, and in their sight he went up to heaven, recommending that they not disperse until they had been clothed with virtue from on high. In fact the apostles and about one hundred disciples with Mary and the holy women withdrew to the Cenacle.

Le Pèlerin,

June 1, 1878, p. 358

¹ The feast of the Ascension is celebrated 40 days after Easter, both feasts being moveable. The Ascension is celebrated on Thursday in some countries and on the following Sunday in others. We have chosen arbitrarily to commemorate it here.

THE

MONTH

OF

MAY

For a long time the month of May has been dedicated to Marian devotion. Many of us know by heart Lambillotte's age-old hymn made popular in places of worship and pilgrimage or during parish missions: "C'est le mois de Marie, c'est le mois le plus beau: á la Vierge bénie, disons un chant nouveau." ("It is the month of Mary, it is the month most fair; to the Blessed Virgin, let us sing a new song"). Neither Fr. d'Alzon nor the Assumption is behind the times: as to the former, he noted, already in 1846, that he could have never believed that he would love the Blessed Mother so much; as to the congregations of the Assumption Family, they proved to be pioneers in the organizations of pilgrimages to Marian centers. This liturgical primacy given to Mary during the month of May does not at all overshadow other celebrations: (1) St. Joseph, (3) Sts. Philip and James, (12) St. John Stone (a nod to Assumptionists in the region of England), (25) Pope St. Gregory VII, and (26) St. Philip Neri. Let us join Pope John Paul II who, while on pilgrimage to Mexico in 1979, greeted Mary as Mother of Mercy, the one who approaches us, sinners, she who is our hope, she who never ceases to teach us how to make our way to Jesus.

May 1

Feast of Joseph the Worker (Feast of Workers) Work,

the Prayer of One's Hands

What did the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph do throughout their lives? How did Our Lord Himself spend the first thirty years of His life? St. Joseph worked to earn his family's daily bread; Mary looked after the household; from his earliest years Jesus himself helped both his

mother and his foster-father. What wonderful company I keep if only I work in union with them, if I nourish myself with the thoughts which must have engrossed them, if I seek to enter into every one of their intentions, if I imitate their spirit of recollection and their silence, if I work the way they worked! There is no type of work in which Jesus, Mary, and Joseph cannot be my models. All three were familiar with toil that was difficult, lowly and not particularly appreciated by others. Joseph worked long and hard to feed the Son of God as I work to feed the followers of Jesus Christ. Mary took care of the most humble details of the material upkeep of the home, just as I must care for the good of the Congregation to which I belong. Jesus himself, in taking on the most arduous tasks, teaches me that nothing should appear difficult to me if I want to be like him. When I am involved in manual work, do I habitually unite myself with the Holy Family?

Directory, III, 9 "Manual Work"

The Feast of St. Joseph the Worker, patron saint of workers (May 1), was promulgated only in May 1955 by Pope Pius XII. The 19th century was a time when unions, especially, worked hard to raise awareness of the plight of workers and to organize them. May 1 was chosen in 1884 as a holiday at the 4th Congress of Trade Unions of Chicago, together with the demand for an eight-hour work day.

May 2

May, the Month of Mary

When Jansenism put a halt everywhere to people making their way to shrines and declared that all those holy individuals who had been committed pilgrims were either insane or stupid, the Blessed Mother herself vouchsafed a place of pilgrimage in every church for an entire month; such is the origin of the month of Mary.

The institution of the month of Mary, brought about to counteract those who considered ill-advised pilgrimages and other demonstrations in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary that they

judged too devout, is one of those magnificent ironies that heaven reserves for its petty adversaries; these individuals feel it necessary to offer their advice to the Church while ignoring the Church's advice to them. But if the Christian people, derailed for a moment by the philosophers and wise men of the last century, hid in churches and found refuge in holy places, it merely served as fertile ground for pilgrimages to come. Indeed, for the past seven years, the principal highways have once again witnessed the arrival of pilgrims and, when May flowers bloom, there appear everywhere those who walk for God.

Le Pèlerin, 27 April, 1878, p. 272

This devotion of the month of Mary began in Rome at the Roman College of the Jesuits and reached France on the eve of the Revolution. It was officially approved by the Holy See in 1815.

May 3

Saints Philip and James, apostles

I am not surprised by your letter. I have to admit that I was half expecting it, but I think that those things you consider repugnant will one day be the source of profound humiliation for you when, seeking to walk in the footsteps of Our Lord, you realize, after all, that in order to be united to humanity, he had to go quite a bit further from heaven to sinners than you will have had to go from your place to that of my poor children. Shall I tell you, my dear Marie, that I feel responsible for your discouragement? If only I had known how to preach to you more effectively by the example of my own apostolic life, you would have understood a bit better the beauty of this life for the sake of which Our Lord set out by choosing first of all fishermen and commoners just as we have begun with our wool-spinners and our mountain girls. All of this, I repeat, is quite simple in my eyes, and I thank you for having spoken to me with that admirable frankness of yours. Attached as I am to you, this causes me to suffer a little; I would be lying if I were to say the contrary. But you see, Marie, there is someone I love a thousand times more than you, that is, Our Lord.

Letter to Marie Correnson,

August 23, 1866,

(Letters, vol. VI, p. 131)

Marie Correnson (1842-1900), a young woman of the Nîmes bourgeoisie, was chosen by Fr. d'Alzon to become the co-foundress of the congregation of the Oblates of the Assumption. She was the oldest child of a family of ten. At the time of her religious profession, she received the name of Mother Emmanuel-Marie of the Compassion. In 1882, following difficulties with the men's branch of the congregation, the Augustinians of the Assumption, she established her independence as the head of the congregation, then called Oblates of the Assumption, the Nîmes branch, a situation which remained until Mother Chamska's arrival on the scene in 1926.

May 4

The Opening of a Month of Mary

The month of Mary:¹ what better practice could one recommend where everything has dried up or where faith has lost its savor than to present to the love and imitation of Christians a woman who is our model in the struggle against Satan and whose victory can be, if we so desire, the pledge of our own? Mary is our model in struggle, our model in the way of holiness. Mary, victorious over Satan, is the pledge of the triumph of every Christian and of the triumphs of the Church. But for this to happen, two conditions are necessary: for Mary to be a useful model, we must strive to imitate her and we must want to be holy. For Mary to be the pledge of our triumphs, we must call upon her. Imitating Mary, trusting in her, that is the topic of this talk.

Mois de Marie, as found in T.D., vol. 44, p. 109

¹ The month of Mary is not an exception in the liturgical cycle prior to Vatican II: there was the month of Joseph in March, the month of the Sacred Heart in June, the month of the Rosary in October. Furthermore, the Second Vatican Council did not pronounce itself on the matter of maintaining these forms of devotion; rather, it insisted on recalling the fundamental priority of the mysteries of salvation celebrated on the various feast-days of the Lord.

May 5

The Miracles at Lourdes

After everything that has been written about Lourdes, is it necessary to talk about it anymore? Why not? First of all, notice that it is the same water that cures paralytics, causes intestinal tumors to disappear, radically heals cancers, eliminates the overflow of synovial secretions, gives the voice-box of a nightingale to those suffering from tuberculosis who throw up blood and suffer loss of voice, suppresses dropsy, and causes swollen glands to subside in an instant. How appropriate it was for the Virgin Mary, who saw so many people flocking to the spas of the Pyrenees on vacation, to have her own waters in order to encourage prayer! Besides, what Pyrenean spring heals so many illnesses in such a short time? Let's see: is it Cauterets, Eaux-Bonnes, Bagnères, Barèges, or Luchon? Obviously not! It is true that the waters of Lourdes do not heal everyone. And do the other waters cleanse everyone who plunges into them? Moreover, can they heal from a distance in such a way that a sick person who is incapable of being brought to the waters and who pays for the pilgrimage of another sick person is cured without leaving his room? That has just happened. Strange waters that with the application of wet cloths give healing sleep to sick persons who had already been healed once, but who fell again, dislocated all at once hip, knee-cap and ankle and, upon waking, had not the slightest trace of a problem which medical experts said would normally take eight months to heal. As of today, there are thirty-two authenticated miracles, not to mention so many other extraordinary graces.

L'Assomption de Nîmes,

1877, n° 66, p. 325

May 6

Portrait of a layman, a friend, an apostle:

Jules Monnier

One Lenten evening in 1837, Mr. Germer-Durand, a high school professor and a Christian, the likes of which many are needed, introduced to Fr. d'Alzon one of his friends who had been moved by the sermons of Fr. Reynaud, a priest of the Toulouse diocese, and a preacher at the cathedral. He was a young man whose eyes revealed his frankness, ardor, and a keen sensitivity. His mellow voice, which revealed a nervous impressionability, was quite charming. His broad forehead, framed by beautiful, long hair, bore the marks of hard work and his fragile build seemed to bend under the efforts of an energetic will and the bursts of an imagination set afire by the heart.... Jules Monnier, like Mr. Durand a high school professor, was one of those exquisite natures, lost in the University setting, displaced in that setting from his true path. . He was endowed with a superior mind, but one always under control, flexible, free. He would not knock obstacles over, but he would rather go around them and leave them far enough behind him to prove that a crooked line is sometimes the shortest distance between two points.

When I speak of a crooked line, God forbid that I say that all was not very correct with him; but if he ran into a mountain, he found it shorter to go to the right or left than to blow it up.

L'Assomption de Nîmes,

1875, n° 4, pp. 25-27

Jules Monnier (1815-1856), who held tenure at the University, came to teach at Assumption College in Nîmes and was a member of the masculine branch of the Third Order and of the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul.

May 7

Love of Mary, Model of the Christian Life

In His gentle courtesy, Our Lord was not content to be our sole exemplar, either as God or as man; He has given us another to imitate in the person of the Blessed Virgin, his mother, who is our mother as well, the most perfect of the Most High's creatures. Mary is for me both mother and model. My model: I must strive to imitate her as much as a religious in pursuit of holiness is capable of imitating the Queen of heaven and earth. My mother: I must place in her a tender and complete confidence. Even if I could not know more about the Blessed Mother's virtues than I read in the gospels, that would be enough and there would be no need for me to know more. First of all, I can marvel at the prudence of her question to the angel sent to greet her in the name of God. Her obedience and faith are no less obvious when she responds: "I am the handmaid of the Lord".¹ This faith is the source of all the wonderful things accomplished through her; this is what Elizabeth points out when she says to her, "Blessed is she who

believed that the promises made to her by the Lord would be fulfilled.”²

Directory, I, 5 “Desire for Holiness”

¹ Lk 1:38

² Lk 1:45

Fr. d'Alzon developed a deep devotion for the Blessed Mother. Nevertheless, he gave to his first congregation the official name Augustinians of the Assumption and thus demonstrated his desire to place it first of all under the patronage of St. Augustine and secondly under that of the Assumption. This latter title, “Assumption,” served in the beginning to refer to the college in Nîmes, taken over by Fr. d'Alzon in 1843. Later, as a result of his relations with the foundress of the Religious of the Assumption in Paris, the term “Assumption” was thereafter broadened to designate a spirit common to both congregations.

May 8

***Mary, Model of Mothers*¹**

First of all, I will consider the mother of a family. Ladies, as I discuss this topic, I feel that I will have both a lot and not much to say. Which mother has not suffered, and quite a bit? And what can I teach you in this regard? How much tenderness and care are in her heart! How many responsibilities she bears! Her affections are a cross, her duties are demanding. She carries as a heavy burden the weight of all those who surround her: her husband whom she loves and who loves her, her children, her relatives; in the end, the whole weight of the household. Everything around this mother of a family calls forth her tenderness and care and her suffering. Then there is that circle which never ceases to grow around her whether within her family or in

the ranks of friends that, though more extended, bind her no less painfully. Yes, she must suffer, this woman who has united her destiny with that of her husband, the mother who watches over her child from the crib to the cruel hour of separation.

Sermon on the Compassion of Mary

(March 1871), The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 1013)

¹ The month of Mary also presents an opportunity in many countries to celebrate mothers of families on various days. The purpose of Fr. d'Alzon is to exalt the figure of Mary as mother and model of Christian family life where love becomes a gift even to the point of the free choice of accepting the portion of suffering inherent in every life.

May 9

Anniversary¹

Tomorrow will be the fifty-fifth anniversary of my baptism. That tells you that I am no spring chicken. How much longer must I stay in this world? God alone knows. If it be His will, I would very much like to leave behind a series of ideas that seem to me helpful in the development of Our Lord's Kingdom. Perhaps it's foolish pride that prompts me to say this, but it's absolutely true that I see a great deal of good to be done. My daughter, I would like you to help me in accomplishing this good. We can take this up again at a later time. What I can say now is that, if the possibility of religious life is neither a matter of discouragement nor of enthusiasm for you, I wish that this possibility be for you one more thing that forges a bond between us in seriousness of purpose, a spirit of self-sacrifice, and the love of Our Lord and of His Church and that it grow in your soul. I promise to support you in every way that I can.

Letter to Marie Correnson,

(Letters, vol. V, p. 402)

¹ In his correspondence Fr. d'Alzon mentions more readily, but not exclusively, the anniversaries of his baptism (September 2) and his ordination (December 26) than that of his birth (August 30), as if to emphasize what he considered to be his truly human and spiritual identity. That is why it is possible justifiably to speak of his three "births." In families, birthdays and anniversaries are reference points that help to stress the bonds of affection which last throughout life. If we assign days to honor mothers and fathers of families, as we should, it would also be advisable to celebrate the wedding anniversary of parents each year so as to underline the depth of their choice in founding a home and in fostering a shared family spirit.

May 10

Responsible Motherhood and Fatherhood

The duties of parents begin even before a child is born. How many precautions a mother must take in order to assure a safe delivery! One cannot imagine the little knowledge that people who are thought to be educated have in this matter. In a conversation I had I remember being consulted by a well-placed woman who wanted to know if I would give her permission to have an abortion. I am not sure what astonished more: the question itself or the matter-of-fact way in which it was posed. A pregnant mother must avoid all fatigue or violent exercise that would induce the premature birth of her child. Simple, ordinary people have recourse to certain medicines; the upper classes go horse-back riding ... a child is conceived. A mother must avoid heavy work, dangerous situations, outings, pleasures and emotions which could harm the fruit of her womb. When is the fetus quickened (i.e. endowed with a soul)? There is nothing definitive on this subject. Dom de Bruyne contends that it is at the moment of conception. He states clearly that it is prudent to baptize every fetus; but is it certain that it has a soul? Let us leave this question to the experts in sacred embryology. Let us urge parents to fulfill their duties

as fathers and mothers in away worthy of Christians.

Ecclesiastical Conference, December 1847,

as found in T.D., vol. 48, p. 251 (D01233)

Let us recall that the controversial encyclical of Pope Paul VI in 1968, *Humanae Vitae*, did not aim first of all at the question of regulating births but at the essential issue of responsible parenthood. In this sense the advice given by Fr. d'Alzon is astonishingly modern.

May 11

***Our Lady of Salvation*¹**

“Notre Dame de Salut”² – this is what my focus is at this point: storming Heaven with ceaseless prayer – refusing to be discouraged – refusing to take “No” for an answer. How can I describe this torrent of prayer which wells up from the bosom of the Church in times of persecution? What can I say except that it tilts the scales of Divine Justice. “*Multum valet deprecatio justis assidu.*” The assiduous prayer of the just has an immense value” (James 5:16). Prayer is the wonderful product of the Communion of Saints. So let us pray and get others to pray. Let everybody pray as hard as they possibly can. Our prayers, together with those of Christ our Saviour, will finish by forcing open the very gates of Paradise. Nothing is more evident than that the “soft life” of Christians constitutes a major obstacle to the action of divine mercy. How do you want the heart of God to be touched by prayers coming from souls plunged into a constant search for every kind of comfort, and, sometimes, even of forbidden pleasures? Yes, we must have the courage to live a more austere life. We must learn to cut out a whole lot of those petty comforts and sensual concessions which serve only to weaken our character, and produce men ready to compromise on every religious issue as long as it doesn't interfere with their personal pleasures.

Thirtieth Meditation,

The Essential d'Alzon (ES pp. 566-567)

¹ Our Lady of Salvation owes its origins to the association of prayer of the same name created on the January 24, 1872 in the chapel of Rue François Ier in Paris, under the auspices of a beautiful medieval statue of the Virgin with Child, found in 1835 at a dealer in second-hand goods by a student of Clichy. It would be given to the superior at the time, Fr. Charles Laurent. Transferred to Auteuil, disfigured during the time of the Commune in 1871, the restored statue found its place in the chapel of Rue François Ier, after the renovations of the site (1986).

² The Association of Our Lady of Salvation had, during the months that preceded the year 1878-1879, when Fr. d'Alzon wrote this meditation, collected, under the direction the Assumptionists, petitions numbering up to 1,600,000 signatures, as well as prayers for the nation that spread with a remarkable burst of energy in all the dioceses of France. The Association of Our Lady of Salvation gained a certain reputation for itself as a result this flood of public prayers that defeneded, after the dark years of the war of 1870, a certain number of measures of a social nature such as respect for Sunday, the obligation of maintaining Sunday as a holiday, or, again, the right of Catholics to influence Christian legislation.

May 12

Saint John Stone¹

(Patron of the English Region)

The Saints can hardly be described as “popular” nowadays – lots of people don't like them. The pleasure-seekers don't like them – they find their moral code far too severe. Nor do the Church's enemies – because they do such credit to the Church.

Nor, above all, do those “Free-Thinkers” who reject the supernatural. So the Saints meet with plenty of opposition. The Saints, nevertheless, are an undeniable fact. They prove such exceptions to human mediocrity – they furnish the Church with such powerful influence – they manifest so clearly the existence of the supernatural that Christians cannot abandon them to the cynical hatred of those who have neither the courage nor the ability to follow in their foot-steps. The time has come to honour them more than ever. These “Lives of the Saints” provide an increasingly necessary and effective antidote to the helplessness and hopelessness which pervades contemporary literature.

Introduction to the Collection “Lives of the Saints”,

The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 1052)

¹ Augustinian martyr (1583) and monk of Canterbury, who refused to recognize the spiritual supremacy of the King, canonized in 1970 along with the Forty Martyrs of England and of Wales. Today is a good time to pray for the Augustinians of the Assumption in England. In London, at Bethnal Green, the Assumptionist community took up residence in 2005 in completely renovated facilities – the work of the architect, Jonathan Freegard.

May 13

Homage to a symbol of faith,

Father Peyramale

The death of Msgr. Peyramale¹ is an immense loss for the Church and for Catholic France. He was a good and faithful servant and especially courageous. What a rare example and all the more wonderful! He always put his hand to the plough and never looked back; one night he fought three wolves and put them to flight. All his life he fought the three great wolves of modern society: the Revolution, naturalism,² and greed. It was difficult to love the Church more than he did. If he had been mercenary, he could have accepted the stones of Massabielle that the municipal council of Lourdes offered him; he had them ceded to his bishop with the same joy with which he gave me his mountain staff not long ago. Did I suspect, when I accepted it, that he no longer needed it and that the pilgrimage of his life was nearly over? His heart overflowed as well as his intelligence in this figure, so handsome and venerable. He could have been a bishop; he preferred to die a parish priest. My God, give us many pastors endowed with this apostolic character! We include the letter of Mr. Henri Lasserre about his death. It was only right that the author who told of the apparitions of Mary should tell us as well of the last moments of the great witness of the wonders of Lourdes.

L'Assomption de Nîmes, 1877, no. 67, p. 333

¹ Msgr. Marie-Dominique Peyramale (1811-1877) was Bernadette Soubirous' pastor at the time of the apparitions in Lourdes in 1858.

² A philosophical position which upholds that there is nothing which exists outside of nature and excludes anything supernatural.

Many Christians remember that May 13 is also the feast day of Our Lady of Fatima (1917) and the anniversary of the attempt on the life of Pope John Paul II in St. Peter's Square, Rome, in 1981. It is also the feast day of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, formerly the patroness of the North American Province of the Assumptionists, whose principal apostolic activity, Assumption College, is situated in Worcester, Massachusetts (USA). Finally, it should be added, on May 13, 2005, Fr. Richard Lamoureux, A.A. (also of Worcester) was reelected as Superior General of the Augustinians of the Assumption.

May 14

Saint Matthias, Apostle

Jesus Christ ascended into heaven; he told the apostles to stay in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high. After the Ascension of the Lord, which they had just witnessed, they took refuge in the Cenacle. There Peter spoke up and proposed that the mysterious void created within the Twelve by Judas be filled. Matthias was chosen to replace him. The apostles, with the brothers of Jesus, with Mary, and with the holy women were praying together; all of a sudden, once the fifty days after Easter had elapsed, *cum complerentur dies Pentecostes*, a violent wind was heard. In the room where all of them were gathered, the Spirit of God revealed itself exteriorly in the form of tongues of fire that came to rest on the heads of the disciples. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.¹

Le Pèlerin, May 31, 1879, p. 342

¹ This commentary on a homily given by Fr. d'Alzon in *Le Pèlerin* starts with a simple paraphrase of the Pentecostal story according to *Acts 2*

, preceded by the election of Matthias to replace Judas, Acts 1: 15-26. Fr. d'Alzon writes "Mathias" in stead of Matthias.

May 15

The Rosary

The rosary reminds me of the principal mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ and of his divine mother. If I recite it attentively and with a spirit of recollection, I can find in it the subject of excellent meditations. But I must follow the order of the mysteries and know how to apply them in a manner most useful to my soul, in such a way that the rosary becomes for me a sort of review of the religious virtues during which I examine how I practice them, in what ways I do not and that I then ask for the grace to acquire those I do not yet have. It is with Mary, my mother, that I converse about these virtues, of whom she is, for me, the model, as well as of the perfections of her Son. The rosary should help me to penetrate the life of Jesus and Mary more intimately. How have I fulfilled this sacred exercise? Isn't it in a routine way, without attention and with all sorts of distractions encountered along the way? Has the rosary been a real exercise of devotion for me? Or, rather, hasn't it been a kind of purely mechanical operation? What respect did I show for the Blessed Virgin whom I was invoking, for the grandeur of the mysteries that I was to reflect upon, a serious meditation of which could have done me such good?

Directory, III, 15, "The Rosary"

The rosary is a private form of prayer consisting of the reciting of 50 Hail Marys, with, between each decade, a Glory be to the Father and an Our Father and the recall of the Gospel mysteries of the life of Christ and Mary. The rosary was originally comprised of three sets of mysteries. In his apostolic letter of October 16, 2002, Pope John Paul II proclaimed a year of the Rosary and added five "luminous" mysteries to the traditional joyful, sorrowful, and glorious ones.

May 16

Creating Christian Families

Permit me to urge you to pray for the Council a lot and to urge others to do so. At this moment the preparatory commission must correct the drafts of the Constitution that will be presented to the Council regarding infallibility and primacy. That will begin tomorrow or Wednesday. I also

want to ask you for prayers for Assumption. God seems to be blessing it, but how much we must work in the order of faith and in that of charity! Since charity seems more suited to you, I cannot tell you how much I congratulate myself for having encouraged you in your works. Why do we not see that the salvation of society is there? Only let me add: after having "created" Christians we must work at creating Christian families. I know that the effects of the Revolution will make this second task more difficult than the first, but that is not a reason to give up. It is important to know the goal even if it will not be attained at the first attempt.

Letter to Mrs. Varin d'Ainville

May 8, 1870

(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 357)

Mrs. Varin d'Ainville (d. 1882), wife of the former deputy Jean-Baptiste-Félix (1806-1857), had Fr. d'Alzon as a spiritual director. The couple had three children: Amédée, Cécile, and Isaure; the last became a Religious of the Assumption under the name of Sr. Jeanne-Emmanuel (1838-1880). Mrs. Varin was a great benefactress of Assumption and organized many social and charitable works in the region of Alès.

May 17

Feast of Pentecost

May all those who received the divine Spirit withdraw within themselves. They, however, did not receive it directly as did the apostles. They received it by imposition of hands by the heirs of the apostles. They received it after baptism, in order to have life and life to the full. This life flows in them, and this life is like a new soul given to them, the life of the children of God. They are the temples of the Holy Spirit, called to be very holy themselves, if they so desire. O, baptized man, you are a child of God. But that is not enough: the Spirit designates you as his soldier to fight his battles. God, who without you can vanquish his enemies and pulverize them, desires to have need of you. He wants you to fight for him with the weapons with which he clothes you, with the strength he gives you. Go, advance successfully and reign once the visit is won. The Holy Spirit is within you, what do you fear? Aren't you sure of victory as long as you listen to him and obey him? Let us go higher. The Holy Spirit gives life not only to each Christian, he acts throughout the whole Church. What the whole soul is for the body, the Holy Spirit is for the Church of Jesus Christ, declares St. Augustine; thus it gives it life, enlightens it, communicates to it his almighty power.

Le Pèlerin, May 31, 1879, p. 342

(Homily for Pentecost)

Pentecost is celebrated 50 days after Easter as its name indicates. Its annual mobility is linked to the date for Easter and so is variable in the yearly calendar. Therefore the choice of May 17 here is fortuitous.

May 18

Holding on to the freedom of the Church,

beyond diplomacy

The Congress of Vienna had been on the verge of granting to Austria the Italian delegations. England alone, by its opposition, prevented such a glaring usurpation. England rendered several other services to the Pope, for which she asked that the Irish clergy be given a pension by the state and that the King of England have the right to recommend names for the bishoprics. As damaging as was the treaty for religion, the Pope, to manifest to a Protestant power his gratitude for having been rescued from the pretensions of His Apostolic Majesty and the concessions of His very Christian Majesty, was on the verge of signing. Then the English bishops sent one of their confreres to declare that they would never accept such a Concordat, for in submitting themselves to it they would kill the faith in Ireland and that they preferred to live off the bread of their poor compatriots than off the gold that England was throwing to them as the price of their freedom. The Pope, who at first did not understand well, negotiated; the bishops held firm, the Concordat was not signed, freedom was saved, and today this heroic Church is advancing, doubtlessly in the midst of painful struggles, but also in the midst of glorious victories, toward a most brilliant future.

Letter to Rev. Fabre

August 24, 1834

(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 50)

Emmanuel d'Alzon had known this Rev. Césaire-Frédéric Fabre (1803-1877) as spiritual director at the major seminary of Montpellier in the years 1832-1833.

May 19

To embrace the diocesan, local Church

Very well! The same God, whose thoughts are impenetrable, before striking the Church of France with the terrible blow which would shake it to its foundations, had merciful designs upon our country. It was part of his marvelous designs that the Church of Nîmes, after having seen its last bishop proscribed as a criminal, after having been united for a time to a neighboring church, rose, as it were, from its ashes, and enlarged by the remains of several neighboring dioceses, became of all the episcopal sees of France the most difficult to occupy. It was in order to fill it that God saw to it that the bishop we now mourn was born not only in a province where, from the very beginning, faith was maintained in its primitive purity but also on the frontiers of a Protestant country, so that from his very cradle the double spectacle of majestic firmness of the truth and of the perpetual fluctuations of error fortified in his soul his attachment to the Church and led him to feel above all in his heart that touching compassion that forever inspired him in his relations with our separated brethren.

Funeral oration for Bishop de Chaffoy,

October 6, 1837

(T.D., 1-5, pp. 7-25)

Bishop de Chaffoy (1752-1837) was the first bishop of Nîmes of the 19th century after that see had been reestablished in the Concordat of 1817. Fr. d'Alzon attended him in his last moments and was chosen to deliver the public eulogy at his funeral, according to prevailing custom. This brilliant discourse drew lots of attention and was even so controversial that he felt obliged to have it printed so as not to give rise to any polemical interpretations that would distort its spirit.

May 20

The flag of the Christian, the Cross

I have definitely made up my mind and each day it is confirmed as I read the second psalm, upon which I urge you to meditate. I am more and more convinced that both the people and the kings are at fault; therefore, let them chasten each other. It is clear to me that what the priest must do is to work with whatever strength he has to establish Christ's kingdom, without getting lost in useless arguments. His king is Jesus of Nazareth; his tribune, Calvary; his flag, the Cross. Attach no color to this flag. The cross to which the God-Man was bound, the one that appeared to Constantine, was neither red nor white, and yet, the world was saved by the former and conquered by the latter. The most intimate thought of my soul is that the world needs to be penetrated by a Christian idea; otherwise it will fall apart. And the world will not receive this idea but from men who will be taken up with it before all else in order to proclaim it in every form that it might assume. They say the world is evil. No doubt, passion turns it away from what is good. But I believe most of all that the world is ignorant. Therefore, we need to teach it and to do so in words it can understand.

Letter to Alphonse de Vignamont,

March 18, 1835

(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 64)

Alphonse de Vignamont, native of Pézenas, was a childhood friend of Emmanuel d'Alzon. It is striking to note that this reflection on the primacy of the Christian Cross without label, dating from 1835, continued to inspire Fr. d'Alzon, to the point that in 1879-1880 he pressured the religious of Paris when it was a question of finding a new title for a review to succeed the *Revue of Christian Education*

. Thus was born in 1880 the

Croix-Revue

(

Cross Review

), three years before the daily

La Croix

(

The Cross
) appeared.

May 21

The tenderness of a Father for his daughters

Do you know that in an hour or two, I will be in the pulpit? I've been asked to preach for the poor. How can one manage to resist such an invitation? But be reassured, the little fatigue that this may cause me I will offer up for you, that you may grow in numbers. If you only knew all that I say about you! How I boast of you! How I play the owl speaking of the charm of its little ones! 'My little ones are such darlings.' I am trying to whet the appetite of many young women to seek to become an Oblate. Will we succeed? But how much we must also work hard at it! And how much this year must be a year of progress, a year of holiness, for those who will remain! That is why I am perhaps doing much better than it appeared at first in delaying my trip forty-eight hours. I am giving you this time to begin the work of your conversion. I want you to sanctify yourselves using all means, but especially regularity, obedience, charity, and humility.

Letter to the Oblates of the Assumption,

August 28, 1868

(Letters, vol. VII, pp. 154-155)

[Part of this passage is repeated on February 29]

Fr. d'Alzon always had but one word of command for the members of the two congregations that he founded, the need for a permanent conversion in regards to the evangelical choice that is the foundation of their Christian existence: become saints. The question of means is but secondary. The same call to Gospel holiness resounds in the conciliar texts of Vatican II,

without distinction of one's state of life, for all Christians animated by their baptismal faith.

May 22

Mutual affection as the lever of perfection

I do not know if you have, as much as you could have, the Christian tenderness of two sisters, in whom the friendship of the soul is stronger even than the bonds of blood. St. Theresa speaks somewhere of this friendship and wishes she could be its object, because it is useful to the one who is its object, and is a virtue in the soul possessing it. Do you wish, from now on, to love one another in this way? You answer yes, assuredly, and that is not one of those embarrassing and troubling questions for ones dear to me. Very well! If your answer is affirmative, then you must promise to mutually support one another, to no longer pay attention to the little problems that created a little coolness between you, at the time of Juliette's departure for Vichy. That's not all, or rather it's really nothing; it's necessary, that in a Holy Communion that you will make for one another, that you ask our Lord for the strength to accomplish the mutual tasks that weigh upon persons resolved to spur each other to perfection. It will not always be easy. Each of you will want now and then to gain the upper hand; one will be too excited, the other too somber; one will be discouraged when the other will be full of life. It's none the less true that the Holy Spirit said: "The brother who is helped by his brother is like a fortified city" (Pr. 18:19).

Letter to Juliette Combié and to Mrs. Doumet,

September 19, 1858

(Letters, vol. II, pp. 527-528)

There were four Combié siblings. Other than the two mentioned, there were Maurice and Sr.

M. Catherine.

May 23

Obedience of Mary

Jesus is both her God and her son. As a good son he must provide for his mother. In this his last testament we see the proof of his tenderness for John, the beloved disciple – he entrusts his mother to him! O Jesus, teach me to take your mother's interests to heart. O Mary, teach me to obey Our Blessed Lord as you did when he mapped out the remainder of your life by saying to Saint John: "*Ecce Mater tua*, Here is your mother"... and from that day John took you into his heart and into his home. But Jesus had begun by telling his mother: "Here is your son" – and the Church looks upon Saint John as having represented all of humanity on this occasion. "Sons of Adam, here is your mother. You are putting me, your saviour, to death. Having delivered myself up to you, and for you, I am offering you in return the most loving heart that ever beat – the most loving heart of my own dear mother." And Mary accepts this deal. She accepts as her children the very executioners of her son. The Roman soldiers were mere instruments, acting under orders. Our Lord's real executioners were the sinners like you and me. O Mary, what an immense effort of loving obedience it took you to accept the likes of us as your children! With what motherly affection you adopted us! May I, from this day forward, accept as a brother or a sister whomsoever Jesus sends my way. And if I experience repugnance towards any of them, let me remember how whole-heartedly you submitted to Jesus' dying wish – by adopting those who had just killed him.

Instruction on Compassion,

The Essential d'Alzon (ES p.1012)

One can admire the accuracy of this theological reading of the Passion of Christ, to the detriment of those more or less arbitrary historical interpretations that inevitably end up falsifying

the realities of the mystery of the Redemption by laying the responsibility for Christ's death on the 'instruments.'

May 24

Mary and the Church

Indeed, other motives apart, there does exist between these two Christian truths a complementary relationship whereby one definition would inevitably pave the way for the other. Jesus Christ always placed Mary his Mother and the Church his Spouse on an almost equal footing. As Saint Augustine puts it, both are mothers and both are virgins. “ *Ecclesia quoque et virgo et mater est.*

The Church too,” he says – “is a virgin mother.” If Mary is the purest of virgins, so is the Church. The former gave birth to Truth – the latter to the deposit of Truth. Is it not eminently fitting that the Pope who crowned Mary's head with the brightest of her diadems, should be the same Pope to proclaim in her person the virginal triumph of the Church? The Doctor of Hippo shows us the bishops eager to keep watch over the virginity of the spouse of Christ: “

Quomodo virgo nos est, cujus integritate consulimur.

How could she not be a virgin,” he cries, “when we are charged with maintaining her integrity?” But where are we to look for this ecclesial virginity in all its splendour? Not, I fear, in the Church taught, the mass of the faithful. Can we say with absolute assurance that it is in the episcopacy, when we have seen and still see so many heretical bishops? It is contained, as in a reservoir, within the mind and heart of our Sovereign Pontiff – from whence it flows like a river onto those bishops truly in union with Peter. And what a great Council this will be! By proclaiming the infallibility of the Pope, it will have proclaimed here on earth the virginity of the Church

Love of Mary,

The Essential d'Alzon (ES pp. 1002-1003)

also, Letter to Bishop Dupanloup,

March 29, 1870 (Letters, vol. VIII, p. 285)

It was Pope Paul VI who, at the end of Vatican II, presented Mary as 'mother of the Church', through a specific gift of Christ to mankind.

May 24 is the anniversary of the founding of the Oblates of the Assumption, at Le Vigan (Rochebelle) in 1865.

May 25

Saint Gregory VII, pope

We celebrate today the feast of Saint Gregory VII, the pope who perhaps suffered the most for the Church. But what does suffering matter, as long as the beauty of the crown is enhanced? Your trials attach me to your Institute, for they can be a chastisement that will purify you and a test that will sanctify you. Pretend you are dead, recollect yourselves, strengthen yourselves in the religious spirit. God has his ways. But you need to take care of what you must do. Certain arrangements might be made that would allow us to assume a bit more responsibility for you, if that were to be of any good. We could look into that. It's clear that you are the object of a great deal of antipathy on the part of a few people. On the first nice day, I will go to see you, even though I have three First Communions I must do one after the other.

Letter to Mother Marie-Véronique of the Heart of Jesus Lioger,

May 25, 1879

(Letters, vol. XIII, p. 121)

Fr. d'Alzon liked to celebrate in Saint Gregory VII the model of popes as defenders of the Church and its rights in face of the pretensions of modern States and the vindications of the rights of man.

Mother Lioger (1825-1883), foundress in 1857 of the Religious Victims of the Sacred Heart, met with the hostility of the ecclesiastical authorities of Grenoble and Lyons. Their motherhouse was moved to Villeneuve-lès-Avignon (Gard). Fr. d'Alzon, named ecclesiastical superior of the congregation, had to intervene in order to support them.

May 26

Saint Philip Neri, founder of the Oratory

In reading the book on the spirit of Saint Philip Neri, I am struck by the absolute tendency of the Oratorians in finding good only what their founder had done. It seems to me that there are a few precautions to be taken in this regard; for, after all, there would be nothing left for you to do but to become Oratorians, if this were the only advice to be followed. I submit these observations to you, for perhaps it would be necessary to have determined one's conditions beforehand, in order not to be pushed in a direction that is not one's own. When all is said and done, I do not believe that this was the true spirit of St. Philip, who had a special affection for the Capuchins and the Dominicans; he accepted, therefore, and encouraged a spirit other than that of the Oratory. I would like to know if his disciples are as broadminded.

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jésus,

March 5, 1857

(Letters, vol. II, p. 209)

At the time there was question of securing an Oratorian chaplain for the community of the Religious of the Assumption in London. Thus the preoccupation and the warning of Fr. d'Alzon as to the true spirit, not so much of the founder of the Oratory, recognized as open and friendly toward other foundations, but rather toward that of certain of his disciples of the 19th century who might have proven to be narrow-minded and sectarian.

On May 26, 2002, in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, John Paul II declared as martyrs the three Bulgarian Assumptionists executed in 1952.

May 27

Mary and the Eucharist

The century which has witnessed the foundation of our religious family is a century in revolt. We are divinizing Man and denying God his rights. The Church has counteracted this deplorable tendency by making it the century of Mary and the century of the Blessed

Sacrament. With the same end in view I have taken for motto¹: “*Adveniat Regnum Tuum* . Thy Kingdom Come”! To proclaim the rights of God and the Kingship of Christ made manifest in the self-abasement of the Holy Eucharist – to enhance Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament – to encourage the practice of the Forty Hours and outdoor processions – in other words to develop every possible aspect and reminder of Jesus’ rights and Jesus’ triumph through his Eucharist – such has become my mission. Jesus alone can enable me to understand this mission and give me the strength to accomplish it. His love draws me to the tabernacle. He wants to be united to me every day. Through me he wants to bear fruit for eternal life.

Meditation on the Eucharist,

The Essential d’Alzon (ES p. 952)

¹ We know that Fr. d’Alzon took this motto, found in the Our Father, from the Constitutions of the Sisters of Marie-Thérèse and thereafter made it his own. He likewise proposed it as a motto for the Religious of the Assumption in July 1843, and gave a commentary on it in his letter of August 15, 1843 to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus (*Letters*, vol. II, p. 86). It is easy enough to follow the thought of Fr. d’Alzon here in the connection that he establishes between Christ, Mary, the Church, and the Eucharist. Mary is the very model of this obedience to the rights of God and of Jesus Christ. She is also the highest figure in the Church, she who is born of the Eucharist. The Eucharist makes the Church just as the Church makes the Eucharist. Quite naturally, in exalting the mission of Mary and in developing the cult of the Eucharist, the Church deepens its link of belonging to Christ and strengthens the rights of God.

The year 2005 was proclaimed by Pope John Paul II as the year of the Eucharist.

May 28

Feast of the Holy Trinity

For we who believe in God, in Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit, we thank the Savior of humankind for assuring that the truth be taught to us, for communicating his grace, and for having raised us, through hope, above the exterior world, above ourselves. Therefore, oh wonderful Trinity, we believe in the unity of your nature, in the distinction of your persons. We bow before the Father, Creator of all things. We accept in faith and obedience the teachings of the Son. We immerse ourselves as much as we are able in the torrents of the Holy Spirit's love. Oh Trinity, in you is power, wisdom, love. From your fullness give us everything that our wretchedness is capable of receiving. Give us the strength to confess you before all. Give us the joy of possessing you in adoration, light, and in the greatest union throughout eternity.

Le Pèlerin, June 1879, no. 127, p. 360

(Homily for Trinity Sunday)

According to the present liturgical calendar, the feast of the Holy Trinity is celebrated on the Sunday following the feast of Pentecost. The place and role of the Holy Trinity in the spirituality of Fr. d'Alzon is brought to light in a monograph by Fr. George Tavard, *The Weight of God: The Spiritual Doctrine of Emmanuel d'Alzon, Rome, 1980*.

Nevertheless, the thought of the founder of Assumption, at least in his earliest years, is distinctly Christological and Christocentric in its favorite themes and expressions: the passion for the Kingdom, the mystical incarnation, or even, Eucharistic adoration, as Fr. Athanase Sage studied and demonstrated it so magisterially.

May 29

Presentation of the Congregation of the Assumptionists (1855)

This little Association has existed for nearly ten years. It has about 25 to 30 members. It runs two schools, one in Nîmes where the congregation began, the other in Paris, as well as a house for the education of very young and poor Protestants, whom the parents entrust to us while authorizing us to make Catholics of them.

The work is supported by devoted lay people who have organized themselves into a Third Order directed by the religious. Teaching in schools, works of charity, publication of good books, teaching poor children is the goal of this Third Order. It is also its purpose, through a rather austere life, to protest against the loose ways of the world.

The religious aim especially at spreading the reign of Jesus Christ in souls, either by the education of the upper classes, or by having the children confided to them involved in all sorts of good works, or by inculcating in them a profound sense of their duty, not only as simple Christians, but also as members of the great society of the Church.

Note given to Pope Pius IX around May 30, 1855

(Letters, vol. I, p. 548)

On May 30, 1855, Fr. d'Alzon had the privilege of a private audience with Pope Pius IX. He presented to him his Congregation, Order, and Third-Order, its spirit, its aim, and the works already begun, as he wrote the day after to Msgr. Doney (*Letters*, vol. I, pp. 550-554). By this time the first draft of the Constitutions had been written. Their approval was simply deferred.

May 30

Saint Joan of Arc (patronage of a heroine)

A crown was offered by the Assumption on May 30 to the heroic virgin whose virtues and valor saved France. It is on May 30 that the heretics burned her to death, four and a half centuries ago. On the crown are the simple words: *The Assumption House, to Joan of Arc*. For a long time we had been looking in one of the dioceses nearest to Paris for a property that offered the most favorable conditions for the establishment of the novitiate. At the time it was located in overly cramped quarters in the space reserved for it in the residence of the Assumptionist Fathers in Paris. Numerous and fervent prayers have been said to address this situation. They have been heard. It is now in Sèvres, in the diocese of Versailles, that the land and the house were found; the bishop had manifested a desire of having a house of the Assumptionists there. This house, which offers several means of rapid and easy communication Paris, has quite a history. It is there that was located the fort or bastion that Joan of Arc entered when she came to rescue Paris from the English. That is why we decided that we would inaugurate this new house on the day of the centenary of Voltaire, which is also the anniversary of the death of Joan of Arc.

The Nîmes Assumption, 1878, pp. 88, 80

Joan of Arc was only beatified in 1909 and only canonized in 1920. She gave her name to a religious congregation of women founded by the Assumptionist, Marie-Clément Staub.

May 31

Visitation of the Virgin Mary

1. Notice the good you can do in the simplest encounters. The greeting of Mary addressed to her cousin sanctifies John in the womb of Elizabeth and prepares him to one day be the greatest of the children of men. And it is this way with the simplest gestures of a religious if they are edifying.

2. Mary's perfections and privileges are explained to us by Elizabeth: *Et beata quae credidisti.*¹ The spirit of faith will enable us to work wonders, will form Jesus Christ in us, and will make apostles of us. When we are ready, our faith will allow God to accomplish all of his promises in us:

quoniam perficientur ea quae dicta sunt tibi a Domino

.²

Fourth Letter to the Master of Novices,

The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 169)

¹ *Blessed are you who believed:* Luke 1:45 (beginning of the verse).

² *Blessed is she who believed that the Lord's promises to her would be fulfilled:* Luke 1:45 (the whole verse).

The Order of the Visitation, founded by Francis de Sales and Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal, held a place of honor in the religious families of the Assumption. Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jesus was sent by Fr. Combalot in 1838 to the monastery of La Côte-Saint-André for her formation. She had the opportunity to read their Constitutions. One of the first R.A. communities in Paris was established in their neighborhood near Luxembourg, on Vaugirard

Street. Fr. d'Alzon frequented their monastery in Tarascon and sent them a few vocations. On the other hand, Bishop Cart did not allow them to come to Nîmes, in spite of the efforts of Sr. Marie-Aimée Féval. At the bishop's death, Fr. d'Alzon favored the arrival in Nîmes of a first R.A. community and there was no longer talk of the Visitation at Nîmes.

THE

MONTH

OF

JUNE

The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when "from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful" they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God. Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life.

It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God and enriches it with virtues, but, "allotting his gifts to everyone according as He wills, He distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank.

Vatican II, Lumen Gentium, 12-13

June 1

Invoking the Holy Spirit

May the Holy Spirit grant me the words that say what I want to be for you! I truly hope that you will believe this. Take your time in writing to me. It is enough for me to know that you are at peace. Before Mass we should recite the *Veni Creator* and right at the end of the Litany of the Blessed Virgin ask of the Holy Spirit and through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin what it is that we must do for the glory of God.

I ask you to be united with us. We are concerned about the upcoming school year which will be fine, but I do foresee some problems that will be quite new. We are going to make a novena to the guardian angels of our students. Do you want to join us in this prayer? I cannot tell you

what prayers we will recite; you may not have a copy of them. What I can tell you is that in the morning before Mass we recite a *Veni Creator* after the Litany of the Blessed Virgin to invoke the light of the Holy Spirit and seek the intercession of Mary in a special way.

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus and Mrs. de Narbonne-Lara.

September 20 and 22, 1851

(Letters □ vol. 1, pp. 88-89)

The Holy Spirit was not a second-class citizen in the preaching, spirituality and written work of Fr. d'Alzon so often the case in the theology of the XIXth century. Invoked and entreated frequently, the Holy Spirit inspired the activity and the thinking which underlay and sustained d'Alzon's daily Christian life.

June 2

Pentecost Season

The apostles spent ten days in the Upper Room in the company of the Blessed Virgin and the holy women who comprised the cortege of the mother of the Savior. Suddenly a loud noise from heaven was heard; there arose a violent wind; different languages were spoken by various people gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover.¹ Universal astonishment fell over the people. The preaching of the Gospel began with Peter; the Church was founded. Without going into this

great mystery in depth, let us look at several main points concerning what happened on that great day.

The Holy Spirit sanctified the apostles; they were new men. Holiness had its saints under the Old Law, some admirable examples to be imitated: Abraham, Moses, Elijah and so many others. Nevertheless the new commandment, *mandatum novum*, had to become somehow more popular. The man of the Old Law was waiting for the Messiah; the man of the New Law waited for heaven whose doors the Messiah opened. For most of God's children, the practice of the virtues touches upon something most intimate, most humble, most intelligent, most energizing. The precepts of the Savior were not to be forgotten and the apostles presented them to us actively in every aspect of their lives. The holiness of the apostles became the seed for the holiness of the whole Church. They were seized by the Holy Spirit and their virtues inspired the hearts of the newly baptized who received this same Spirit.

Le Pèlerin, June 8, 1878, p. 370

¹ The narrative of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-36.

June 3

Saint Charles Lwanga and companions¹

It would be a deplorable and dangerous tendency to imagine that the Saints “have had their day” – that henceforth there will be fewer and fewer of them – that the Blood which sowed the seeds of sanctity on Calvary has become diluted and lost its healthful properties – and that consequently it would be futile to expect Saints from the up-and-coming generation.

Since every era has produced its Saints – its own special kind of Saints: suited to the times – suited to the falsehood which had to be exposed and disproved – suited to the human misery which had to be relieved – suited to the ideals which had to be restored since this has always been so, I entertain no doubt that the Church, in these troubled times, has its Saints in the making. So it was after the Reformation – so it will be after the Revolution. The Reformation is not yet dead, but our saints will outlive it. The Revolution too will decline and fizzle out. So make way for the Saints – they are coming – they may be here already. The Church, ever the same, has its ups and downs. It may well be afflicted today, but it will give birth to saints tomorrow – of this you can rest assured.

Introduction to the Collection of the Lives of Saints,

according to The Essential d'Alzon- pp. 1055-1056

¹ Feast of the 22 young Catholic martyrs of Uganda, burnt between 1885 and 1887 and canonized by Pope Paul VI in 1964 (the Anglican Communion commemorates another 23 of their own martyred at the same time, although the number of both churches certainly far exceeds those officially recognized). The novitiate in Butembo is named after Saint Charles Lwanga and that of Arusha after St. Kizito. Fr. d'Alzon, who died in 1880, could not have known of the heroic exploits of these martyrs of the XIXth century. However, he enthusiastically followed, beginning with his experience at Vatican I, the evangelizing movement that was unfolding in black Africa. As the diocesan director for the Propagation of the Faith, he encouraged taking up collections and read the missionary chronicles published in its *Annals*.

June 4

The bond of family finds its source in a common, original love

The first benefit of family is the bond of blood.¹ This tie establishes authority, unity and equality. As a result of it, a father derives the astonishing power that he exercises; as a result of it, a mother feels an unrivalled love being formed in the depths of her womb toward the child she will present to the world; as a result of it, a son is compelled to love those who transmitted part of their being to him. Look at the many children who surround their father and mother. Carried in the same womb, the same blood circulates in their veins, and the life that flowed through the same channels places in their heart identical heartbeats. The life that was transmitted to their parents is shared in some respects as a new child is born; but these diverse streams sense that, going back to their source, they are reunited in one common source. If you want another image, it is like the branches of a beautiful tree emerging from the same trunk. What brings all these brothers and sisters together is the union of father and mother, who are joined in their mutual love. All these family members are reunited by virtue of the fact that they sense, under the same authority, an equality of nature that constitutes the strongest reason for the equality of their rights.

Sermon on truth (T.D., vol. 42, pp. 202-203)

¹ Emmanuel d'Alzon was fortunate to have benefited from a very strong and stable family life. In 1869, he lost his last direct family tie when his second sister Marie died. However, he continued to visit Lavagnac where his nephew, Jean, continued the old family traditions filled with faith and charity.

June 5

The Eucharist, mystery of unity and communion

Jesus teaches us the knowledge of man's union with God – the mediation between God and us. Jesus Christ, one and the same God with God the Father, took unto himself a human nature, and in doing so united Humanity with Divinity in his one Person. But this union is achieved still more marvelously in the Holy Eucharist. When you receive Holy Communion, you and Our Blessed Lord become fused into one – consequently you bring about a “oneness” between yourself and God the Father. Isn't it a wonderful mystery, this Divine Union Our Lord urges us to contract with him! – and where but in the Blessed Sacrament and in Holy Communion can the reality of this contract be brought home to us? It also teaches us how all Christians become linked together in God – because just as each individual by receiving Communion unites himself so closely to Christ as to turn into one with him, so the many individuals who thus receive Our Lord cease to be separate and become members of one and the same body. The Eucharist is not like the food we eat – it doesn't turn into us. On the contrary, this divine nourishment turns us spiritually into Him (Saint Augustine). It is Jesus Christ who absorbs us – so is it not true that by nourishing our souls with his Body, and thus being absorbed into Him, we acquire a unity with Him that is not only mysterious but wonderfully real? And this wonderful unity will be consummated still more wonderfully in the life hereafter when our entire being becomes totally absorbed into God.

Octave of the Most Blessed Sacrament,

The Essential d'Alzon, p p. 968-969

June 6

Article on the Feast of Corpus Christi: 'repositories'¹

At various intervals religion places feasts destined, it would seem, to refresh the human spirit exhausted by work and to re-ignite in one's heart the flame that has nearly been extinguished by one's sufferings, the sad companions of our human condition. It seems that in our exile religion wished to lighten the weight of trials by giving us a glimpse of the rewards of our true homeland... In order to reach this goal, by what ingenious means does it not try to surprise us? For those who don't always grasp the depths of these mysteries, for those who are incapable of being moved by the sublime vision of this community of which we have all become members, religion still has something up her sleeve; she has her pageantry and her feast days for those who have to have their senses stimulated before their hearts are touched. And when is this pageantry ever more evident than on the feast of Corpus Christi, the day on which all Christians who adore Jesus the Savior under the appearance of ordinary bread double their efforts to enhance this solemnity? How touching it is on that day to see the extravagance of the poor peasant decorating the façade of his humble cottage to honor the passage of his God, to acknowledge all the gifts he has received from Him! How one loves to come and pray at these tiny altars, decorated not luxuriously but with the simplicity of its villagers! The hangings are not very rich, the decorations don't have much value, but these hangings like the decorations, often just taken from their homes, become priceless when one considers that they were used to provide a resting place where the Son of Man found a spot to rest his head!

Article published in Le Correspondant,

June 1829, according to T.D. vol. VII, pp. 203, 204

(cf. Letters vol. A, p. 27)

¹ *repositoires*: refers to the small altars on which the Blessed Sacrament was placed during processions.

June 7

Article on Corpus Christi: processions

Should we speak of these solemn processions advancing down the streets as if in triumph? At times, the procession starts with young children emblazoned with the symbols of their patron saints; little angels with golden and sky blue wings present a spectacle filled with grace. It is as if borrowing the bodies of the ones they are in charge of protecting, these heavenly princes come down on earth to make the procession less unworthy of the one who is Master of all. Following the young virgins dressed in white, can you see the elders robed in gray, staff in hand? They are pious pilgrims; they have made many trips, crossed many seas, and now, in their last days, they are happy to see once again the feasts that were the delight of their infancy. It is truly something majestic to behold all the clergy vested in their priestly vestments; it is a pleasure to see these old priests who have carried the burden of work gather round this divine bread that their words so often brought down from heaven, that their hands distributed to so many infirm, and in which they found their strength for the day of battle. There is also something very moving in the choir of young Levites whose thurible bears incense in the presence of the Victim as a symbol of a fervent prayer or in the flowers they toss before the unblemished Lamb, offering Him the pure and delicate flowers of their virginity.

Article published in the Correspondant,

June 1829, according to T.D., vol. VII, pp. 204, 205

(cf. *Letters, vol. A, p. 27*)

The solemnity of Corpus Christi readily took place outdoors in this festive atmosphere.

June 8

Unity and communion in the Holy Trinity

In the name of the Father who created us, of the Son who ransomed us, of the Holy Spirit who sanctified us. Amen. The Holy Trinity desires deeply to take care of fallen humanity with various kindnesses; it made man in its image and likeness.¹ This same Trinity gives to each creature the power to exist and in that way each person resembles the Father, the principle of divine being. This same Trinity gives him the faculty of thinking and in that way each person resembles the Son, the eternal intelligence of the Father. And it gives him the faculty of willing and loving and in that way each person resembles the divine Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

But if creation is more specifically attributed to the Father, to the incarnate Son is especially ascribed redemption by which we are made sons of the Father and we receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes in us and communicates his love which unites to the Father and the Son in the unity of the Spirit.

Le Pèlerin, June 15, 1878, p. 387

¹ According to Gen 1:26. Father d'Alzon outlines the traditional and specific functions within the Holy Trinity: to the Father, the work of creation, to the Son, that of redemption, and to the Spirit that of sanctification. But his presentation is in a sense more mystical since he insists more on the mystery of communion that is the very life of God or in God. The Spirit's role is fully brought out as the generator of divine life.

June 9

Directives for the Congregation

I have several observations to make if the consulter named for our case asks to see you: 1) The name that we want to take is that of Augustinians of the Assumption and not Augustinians of France. 2) If we do not emphasize austerity, it is because, as I already mentioned to you, we wish to receive religious with poor health; the others can go to the Dominicans or the Carmelites. 3) We are not seeking to join the Hermits of St. Augustine or the Canons Regular because it seems to me that the Canons have a rule that is too soft and the Hermits live by constitutions that could possibly hinder us in the activities that we seek to do. 4) Above all, we hold to the practice of poverty. We see it as indispensable for these times and consider it a protest against the mores of the day. 5) We hold to the recitation of the Divine Office and prefer having fewer houses so as to recite it more regularly. 6) We strongly advocate works of charity permitting direct interaction with the faithful and to forestall as much as possible their demoralization. 7) Above all else, we advocate developing in hearts and minds a love for the Church of Rome.

Letter to Fr. François Picard,

January 7, 1857

(Letters, vol. ii, pp. 181-182)

The goal of this letter was to present the principal characteristics under which the Assumption wanted to be known in the Roman milieu with the perspective of obtaining the decree of praise as a first stage to being recognized. Fr. Picard was finishing his theology studies at the time in Rome.

June 10

Eucharistic Adoration

So what are we to render God for having loved us so much? The answer is: we must adore him. We must give him all we have and all we are: our thoughts and feelings, our mind and heart, our body and soul. How few of us adore him to this extent! How many of us wrangle and bargain with God over the very gifts he bestowed to enable our love for him to be total and undivided! To adore Jesus hidden in the Blessed Sacrament we need the three Theological Virtues: Faith, Hope and Charity. Diminished, restricted, reduced to naught, in fact annihilated – Faith reveals him nevertheless to be God: the Almighty and Everlasting God, whose Power, Wisdom and Goodness stretch beyond time and space. Hope reveals him as everything we could possibly desire. On him alone can we, and must we, always depend – for who has ever loved us, and can ever love us, as much as this Vast, uncreated Love? And what about Charity? Can Hope and Charity ever be distinguished in Him who is the infinite expression of both? How is it possible not to love this God of ours? Obedient to the voice of one of his creatures, he comes down onto the altar time and time again. There he hides himself under the sacred species – and there he remains until he has accomplished such a union between Himself and his loved ones as defies every effort of our imagination.

Octave of the Most Blessed Sacrament,

The Essential d'Alzon, pp.981-982

The Eucharist calls into action the three theological virtues: it puts faith to the test, it is a guarantee of hope, and it enkindles charity. Eucharistic adoration, linked to the sacramental celebration, became one of the declared goals of the mission of the Religious of the Assumption. From 1860 on, some of their foundations were established specifically with that in mind. Fr. d'Alzon developed his reflections on Eucharistic devotion more specifically with a view to the foundation of the Adorers between 1855 and 1865, notably on the occasion of a series of instructions that he gave them.

June 11

Eucharistic devotion, ferment of Christian unity

Here is a thought. In the East the iconoclast heresy gave rise to the cult of images. Reaction to the Protestant heresy gave birth to Eucharistic devotion. But the East has been very neglectful of Our Lord: the schismatic East with its sacrileges and the Catholic East by the few honors it renders to the Eucharist. The East should be revitalized by making it participate in what's happening in the West. Unity will return when we can say: *Unum corpus multi sumus omnes, qui de uno pane participamus.*¹

The more we can partake of the Body of Jesus Christ, the more unity will become a reality. I believe that it is essential to develop a love of Our Lord in the Eucharist and if Perpetual Adoration were to be established in your chapel when the Blessed Sacrament is present, I am certain that you would be the beneficiaries of many graces. I am not saying that the Blessed Sacrament must be exposed. What I am saying is that some of your more serious children should always be in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Think it over. I believe this is the essential. When one enjoys being united to Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, one will also want to belong to the Church that lets one participate in this activity the most.

Letter to Fr. Victorin Galabert,

October 4, 1864

(Letters, vol. V, p. 157)

¹ I Cor 10:17: *"We, many though we are, are one body for we all partake of the one loaf."* Let us simply note that Fr. Galabert, present on the spot, knew how to highlight the liturgical patrimony proper to the Orient.

June 12

A brother for life, Eugène Germer-Durand¹

Now, my dear friend, do you understand how I need your friendship, in the full sense of the word? In your education and mine, there is what I would call a level of instinctive ideas that enables you as a simple Christian to understand by intuition what I want to do, much more than others with all of their human reasoning. You also understand why I have been able to accomplish a number of good works without much enthusiasm and why the enterprise to which I am devoted for life is able to my whole being. I, too, could discuss one by one the works that I have undertaken and, perhaps, be justified in doing so. But I would rather admit to one fact that is true, and that is that I have not always shown the required interest that was expected of me....In short, whether one is willing to accept it or not, I will try. I will succeed, God willing; I will fail, God willing. It doesn't matter to me! The idea is in my head and in my heart; I must bring it to fruition in spite of all the human obstacles, which don't bother me at all.

Letter to Eugène Germer-Durand,

May 31, 1845

(Letters, vol. B. pp. 254, 255)

¹ Eugène Germer-Durand (1812-1880), distinguished University professor, who transferred to the Collège de l'Assomption, husband and father of a family, was more than an initial collaborator of Fr. d'Alzon. Confidant and friend, member of the Third-Order, he committed himself with faith to all of the major causes and activities of the Assumption.

Independence Day in the Philippines is June 12. Let us unite in prayer with the Assumption Family in this country and especially with the Assumptionist community that arrived in 2006.

June 13

Association of the Sacred Heart¹

My dear friend, I want to take care of it; I want to take care of you. For God did not fashion our friendship in vain. Poor young man, I'll never lose sight of you. I'll try to keep you close to me. When I ask Our Lord for a place in His heart, I'll do the same for you. It is there that I will see you often. The Association that we've begun, that of the Sacred Heart, is wonderful. The members get together twice a day in the house of divine love. I don't belong to it, but if you want to belong, I will too and twice a day our two hearts will be able to meet. It is stronger than I. I am compelled to keep saying that I love you. Well, yes, I love you, but promise me that you'll love God, that you'll open yourself to Him in all your difficulties and I'll forget everything.

Letter to Lugien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny,

March 25, 1832

(Letters, vol. A, p. 294)

¹ Already in May 1833, at the major seminary of Montpellier, Emmanuel d'Alzon had established a holy alliance to promote greater spiritual fervor among the seminarians by means of a consecration to the cross which he himself had composed (The Essential d'Alzon, p. 750-754) .

June 14

God of love, God-Love

*Deus caritas est.*¹ "God is Love" (I Jn 4:16). Love is part of our human "make-up," one of our faculties. It is more than just a part of God. He actually is Love. God has a will. This will relates to certain objects. The result is Love. You see, love is a force which unites us to something (or someone) in which (in whom) we find happiness. Saint Thomas Aquinas calls it a "unifying force" *Amor est vis unitiva*. Creatures have to love something other than themselves, because no creature is by nature self-sufficient. God, on the contrary, must necessarily love Himself. What would be the epitome of disorder in us is right order in God. Infinite Goodness cannot help recognising and loving itself, because its intellect is unlimited and its will supreme.

Then again, with us love is never unaccompanied by some form of emotion – we cannot attain God without passing through the channel of our senses. God's love operates calmly, above the stratosphere; it is towards this serene, stratospheric love and less on our feelings that we must strive. The more we know God, the more perfect will be our love. Now nothing is more perfect than faith. We must therefore get rid of our personal ideas and make ours by faith the divine ideas.

Octave of the Blessed Sacrament,

The Essential d'Alzon, p. 864

¹ | Jn 4:8. This expression of John's gospel was beautifully taken up in the first encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI from Christmas 2005. This is a typical expression of Scholastic thought, love as a path of or strength for unity. This elevation of divine love is emphasized by Fr. d'Alzon who complained, supporting himself by quoting Bossuet, that people were not studying theology enough and that the clergy was settling for preaching moralistic platitudes. For him, preaching had to be nourished by theology so as to develop piety in oneself and in others.

June 15

Corpus Christi

(Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ

or Feast of the Blessed Sacrament)

My friend, during the octave of the Blessed Sacrament (Corpus Christi), I invite you to spend a little more time than usual at the feet of Our Lord. Implore this good Master to fill you with holy desires. Your spiritual life has waned; you need to implore Him to give it back to you by His converse with you. *Hic est panis* –yes, and He himself is the one who declares it. *Hic est panis de coelo descendens, ut si quis ex ipso manducaverit, non moriatur.*¹

How so? First, because we attach ourselves to Him through faith and therein lies a principle of life. How can the soul live other than by truth? And how can the soul which is finite and obtuse grasp eternal truth except by faith? Here is the miracle. The One who is life eternal in God, who is life and light for the one who comes into this world,² is also bread working within us and unknown to us. At the same time, we give our assent through faith to truth. Just as our eyes upon opening adjust to the light from without and thus we enter into contact with living beings outside of us, so our being incorporates, in eating, an external principle of life.

Letter to Brother François Picard,

June 16, 1851

(Letters vol. I, p. 46)

¹ Jn 6:50: “*This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that a man may eat it and not die.*”

² Jn 1:9. We can easily understand, as we read this correspondence, that the first religious were amazed by Fr. d'Alzon's ability to think and how to communicate ideas known for their solid originality, their breath of faith and their extraordinary vibrancy.

June 16

In favor of a Catholic press

Before leaving Le Vigan, I would like you to write up the program for a Catholic newspaper¹ that should appear on January 1. You are to explain: 1) that we are Catholic before all else; 2) that we are not a political party; 3) that we are, nevertheless, a political party in the sense that, as Catholics, we want our place in the public forum and are prepared to extend a hand to all honest individuals whatever the party and to respect their opinions as long as they respect our principles. Concerning political structures, we believe that terrible upheavals are occurring in Europe and that democracy will triumph in the distant future. Since the aristocracy has disappeared, we would like the bourgeoisie of some large centers to help us understand toward what the bourgeoisie is leaning; we must above all address ourselves to the people. Someone just interrupted me. Set your mind on preaching Catholic ideas that need to penetrate society. Without leaving home, you would have an audience that doesn't always come to listen to sermons and, bit by bit, given the style of the first three pages of your letter, you would have them eating out of your hand. So I recommend this idea to you.

Letter to Fr. Emmanuel Bailly,

December 5, 1870

(Letters, vol. VIII, pp. 533-534)

¹ The daily newspaper *La Croix* appeared for the first time on June 16, 1883, the feast of the Sacred Heart that year. *Le Pèlerin* preceded it (1873), as did the *Vie des Saints* (1878) and the

roix-Revue

(1880). Fr. d'Alzon was interrupted as he wrote this letter and did not reread it; that's why some of what he says in this letter is a bit unclear.

June 17

Visit to the Blessed Sacrament

Tomorrow I will see your father, if I can, since I'll be spending several hours in Beaucaire and we will talk about you; but first I would like to share a word with you. I must admit that your life, as you describe it, strikes me as very interesting, and no matter what you say, you won't experience better times. Take advantage of it. Your rule of life strikes me as perfect, except for one thing that needs to be eliminated, or at least, minimized as much as possible, and two others to be added. I would like to see less time spent on entertainment. As for the additions: 1) each day read a chapter of the *Imitation (of Christ)* seriously and devoutly; 2) when you pass by a church and have the time, take a minute or two to adore the Blessed Sacrament.¹ You are generous, Numa, and Our Lord wants us to love Him and to prove it by these little visits.

Letter to Numa Baragnon,

February 8, 1854

(Letters, vol. I, p. 384)

¹ The visit to the Blessed Sacrament, as a spiritual exercise, is linked to the development of the Eucharistic devotion that since the XIth century in the West tended to offer para-liturgical moments for the veneration of the Sacred Species (outside of the celebration of the Eucharist itself). The reforms of Vatican II insisted strongly on maintaining and strengthening the links between the celebration of the sacraments and the devotions that might flow from them in such a way as to articulate the latter in relation to the dogma of the Eucharist and to give them their rightful place. In October 2004 the Eucharistic Year was inaugurated (Instruction *Mane Nobiscum Domine*).

June 18

Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament

1) From the day you receive this letter until the news of the misfortune that we are all dreading reaches you,¹ each evening Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament shall take place in your church and shall be preceded by the singing the *Parce Domine*, the *Miserere*, and the prayer *Pro infirmis in agone constitutis*

. 2) This same prayer, with the Secret and the Post-communion prayers, shall be recited each day at Mass by the priests of your parish, whom you are to notify of these directives; 3) If the population of your parish is numerous enough to allow it, you are authorized to expose the Blessed Sacrament for three days, using the Forty Hours format. Please notify the communities whom you consider capable of participation without inconvenience of this permission.

Letter to the priests of the diocese of Nîmes,

August 6, 1855

(Letters, vol. I, p. 574)

¹ Bishop Cart, bishop of Nîmes, seriously ill, was on his deathbed. He died on August 12, 1855. This directive is very instructive because it illustrates the widespread use, on the local level of parishes, of all the para-liturgies linked to the devotion of the Blessed Sacrament. The Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was also called Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Fr. René Paris, an Assumptionist, composed the famous *R.P.* to this end.

June 19

Daily Companion

Do you have a crucifix and what's your attitude toward it? First of all, let me invite you to obtain one like that of the Sisters. There is a certain advantage to that. Small crucifixes inspire little devotion (at least for me); large crucifixes are clumsy. If your habit allows you to wear one, be without it as little as possible and arrange it so that you have access to it whenever you wish. Put it on your table when you write; on your knees when you work (so as to look at it from time to time and kiss it); and in your hands when you go to sleep. To be sure, nothing is more precious than frequent communion and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament; but one cannot always have Our Lord substantially present in one's heart; one cannot constantly be at His feet; but one can always carry His image on his person and this image will speak volumes to you.

Letter to the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament,

June 21, 1857

(Letters, vol. II, p. 267)

After the creation of the Association of the Adorers, Father d'Alzon wrote them a series of collective letters to feed the fervor of their initial undertaking. He shared the inner recesses of his soul with them and this passage is one of the most explicit examples of that depth. It bears witness to a mystical grace recently granted to him by the Lord during his illness at Lamalou, deeply troubled by a financial crisis that was jeopardizing the Collège in Nîmes. This beautiful letter on the crucifix, reproduced many times, magnificent in its simplicity, has undoubtedly consoled many a sick person and revived hope in the midst of trial.

June 20

The true homeland of the Christian: happiness and truth in the light of God

Well, truth is the homeland of the Christian. Through the truth the Christian has a father who is God. Through the truth the Christian has a brother who is Jesus Christ as well as brothers and sisters who consist of all men and women. Through the truth the Christian has a field ready to be cultivated by his intelligence. Through the truth he possesses glory, laws, freedom. And if all of this doesn't form a homeland, I don't know what a homeland is. Yet it is even something more: it is the place where one rests, the place where one is happy. And the place where we are happy is not on this earth, but on high. But what kind of rest is to be found on high? Is it not clear vision? Happiness, then, flows from the truth, light from God Himself, in whom it has been given to see the light made for the human eye: *in lumine tuo videbimus lumen*.¹

Sermon on truth (T.D., vol. 42, p. 208)

¹ *'By your light we see the light'*, according to Psalm 36:10b. This passage helps us to grasp clearly the familiar method with which Fr. d'Alzon tried to reach his audience. The deepest mysteries of faith did not frighten him, since he knew how to present them concretely, by analogy of faith, making use of the relationships that united these truths intimately among themselves. Abstract words take on a human tone through the use of images. Fr. d'Alzon was always preoccupied in deepening the many implications of the truths of the faith by clothing them in the language of the world: the relationships of father and brother, the field to be cultivated, the homeland of rest and happiness. The horizon remains with God from whom all light springs.

June 21

The Crucifix

If, when you get up in the morning, you kiss your crucifix with love and promise to carry it throughout the day by retracing the steps of the divine Crucified One; if during your meditation (unless you do it in a church) you hold the cross in your hands and you agree to be immolated on the altar of Jesus' sacrifice; if, to awaken your fervor, you touch your crucifix from time to time; if you squeeze it more firmly during times of anxiety, stress, struggle, or temptation; if, when you set out to perform a good deed, you adore the Crucified Christ remembering that it is once again Jesus Christ in the poor that you are helping; if, at the moment of practicing some form of mortification, you kiss the divine wounds that are the sources of life of the Church and the sources of our purification; if, at night, you go to His feet to engage in an examination of conscience of your day, of your pride in the face of his humbling Himself, of your vanities in the face of His humiliations, of your cowardice in the face of His agonies, of your laziness in the presence of the profuse sweat flowing from this divine body, of your egotism in the face of His

infinite love, of your bouts of impatience, your grudges, your lack of charity in face of His patient waiting and His unfailing tenderness, - Ah! my children, I find it very difficult to believe that your crucifix would not become your friend, your confidant.

Letter to the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament,

June 21, 1857

(Letters, vol. II, p. 267)

The best commentary on this text is that of Fr. d'Alzon himself in his letter dated June 20, 1857 to Marie-Eugénie of Jesus; there he reveals the fruit of his experience.

June 22

At night, before retiring

I'll admit to you with the greatest simplicity that the best moment for me to reflect is especially at night, when I am about to retire. It doesn't take much effort to think of the good Master whose image is held in one's hands. You tell Him that you love Him; you ask forgiveness for your foolishness and are suddenly struck by this forgiveness that comes down from the cross. With remorse, you think of the harm that sin has caused Him, the time wasted, the blessings received. You thank Him for his acts of generosity, make fervent promises. You blush for being in a fine bed knowing that he died on the gallows. You are anxious to love Him and to make up

for lost time. In offering His Son you adore God the Father; you invoke the Holy Spirit that He sent to us; you pray for the Church born on Calvary; you blush for being such bad Christians; then you summon courage as you think of the love and the power of God, and, if you haven't yet fallen asleep, you find that time passes quickly in such company.

Letter to the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament,

June 21, 1857

(Letters, vol. II, p. 268)

Father d'Alzon speaks from experience using this marvelous blend of simplicity and humility in a form of surrender in faith and a spirit of spiritual childhood. Amid the most severe trials, which tested his ego, he knew how to remain in this supernatural atmosphere proper to souls of faith. Knowledge of the mystery of the cross not only helped him live through the trials of health and the crisis of the Collège, but also to sustain the hope of the sick around him and to strengthen the hearts of numerous people who sought his direction.

June 23

The Ministry of Perpetual Adoration

Please believe me when I say that I'll be quite happy to express the sympathy that you are requesting. But, once your chapel has been blessed, I'll have to see if I can come right away to

celebrate Mass at this cherished tomb. That is something I cannot promise at this time in spite of my desire to offer this religious homage in memory of Mr. Varin. No, I didn't want to upset you, but rather tell you everything that I have been thinking; and since I am thinking out loud with you, my thoughts do not go beyond my words... Therefore, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament¹ try to recover your peace and ask Our Lord to lead you, quickly or slowly, according to His better judgment. Nevertheless, try to take into some account our fragility. The ministry of perpetual adoration which has begun in Alès is a very good thing. Try to find associates sufficiently motivated so that this ministry not fail.

Letter to Mrs. Varin d'Ainvelle,

March 4, 1859

(Letters, vol. III, pp. 37-38)

¹ The ministry of perpetual adoration (day and night) is one form of the development of Eucharistic devotion outside of the liturgical celebration of the Mass. It began in Rome as nocturnal adoration in 1810 and was introduced in Paris by 1814 by the future Bishop de la Bouillerie, then in 1848 at the shrine of Notre-Dame des Victoires. In 1885, perpetual adoration was introduced at Montmartre and has continued without interruption.

June 24

Birth of Saint John the Baptist, the Forerunner

It is the very nature of Jesus' generosity that in granting us the possibility of continuing his work, of extending it, of expanding it, that he puts us in a position to return something of what we have received from him. I must admit that the title of savior that Christians must carry in their turn, if they have the fullness of the spirit of Jesus, touches me deeply, since the highest degree of this spirit is to assure that not only they be saved but that they might assist in the salvation of others. In this way they receive light and warmth much like one torch being lit by another, that is, truth and love, and moreover that they assist in communicating them. Like John the Baptist, *they are not the light*,¹ but they are lamps all the stronger and more brilliant by virtue of their greater participation in the redemptive action of the Savior.

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,

January 21, 1850

(Letters, vol. C, p. 542)

¹ According to Jn 1:8. The mystery of Redemption, well understood by Fr. d'Alzon, lies at the heart of Christian faith and constitutes the flip side of the Incarnation. But Fr. d'Alzon is not content to repeat or paraphrase the dogma; he attempts to draw out all the possible implications for his audience. Through the mystical Incarnation, the Christian is driven to give birth to Christian life; through the Redemption, he is called to be concerned about the salvation of his neighbors. The Church becomes the spiritual and incarnate movement of this collaboration or this solidarity in the apostolic missionary work. John the Baptist offers us a striking illustration, he who was not the voice but the spokesperson, he who was not the light, but the torch or the lamp preparing or preceding this light.

June 25

When grief strikes: the death of a friend

I write to you with a very heavy heart: my old friend Du Lac died while I was at Arras. He will be buried shortly. Since he lived at Bon Fontaine for twenty years and since people do not care for hotel draperies, his body was transferred without fanfare to Saint Thomas Aquinas. I was able to accompany the corpse with Veuillot; the funeral ceremony takes place today. Mr. d'Esgrigny would like the body to be transferred to Picardy to the family plot. Alas! To leave from here or from there for the final judgment, what does it matter to this dust that was our body? A whole world that I knew is beginning to disappear. There were four of us: Gouraud, d'Esgrigny, Du Lac, and myself. Du Lac is gone. His death wounded poor Gouraud, who was cured by a homeopath after some time. He came to his deathbed driven by friendship. The Veuillots were to be admired, but the collapse has finally begun.

Letter to Marie Correnson,

August 9, 1872

(Letters, vol. IX, p. 410)

Jean-Melchior, count of Montvert Du Lac and d'Aure (1806-1872) was a close and longtime friend of Emmanuel d'Alzon, whom he came to know during his university days in Paris. He became a seminarian and even briefly tried monastic life with the Benedictines of Solesmes. His ecclesiastic vocation was thwarted by family problems. He ultimately found his calling in journalism at *l'Univers*, alongside Louis Veuillot with whom he shared an ultramontane enthusiasm. A man of simple taste, he lived discreetly as a celibate with a certain austerity of principles. Fr. d'Alzon delighted in contacting him on all the issues that were stirring in the capital, notably those that emanated from the nuncio's residence. This unexpected death plunged him into sadness, moving him to sense the end of his century.

June 26

God, source of all knowledge and all search for truth inscribed in man

I beg you, my brothers, to join me in casting a quick glance at the works of the human spirit. Why do we rummage through the annals of history, trying to return to the origins of people or to study the work of social formations? Why do you see people bent down to the earth looking at plants and classifying them by species, studying the behavior of animals and attempting to understand the laws of nature, excavating the sides of mountains to reveal the timeline of the universe? Why do others, leaving the world of bodies, enter into the world of knowledge and, withdrawing into themselves, try to meditate on the phenomena of the moral world? Why are there so many systems? Why so many religions? What is the source of this hidden energy that compels the human spirit toward the unknown?

Why? Because one wants to know truth. Truth is the ultimate goal, and through whatever form it has presented itself to him over time, in the physical world or in the spiritual world, truth is pursued everywhere with unbelievable avidity. Yes, truth is food for the human spirit. He wants it and seeks it with all his strength. But will it be found in history, in the physical world, in the intellectual world? And when I speak of truth in history or in nature, notice, please, that I am not referring to that truth that consists in discovering certain isolated facts, but rather to the truth that dominates them all. But, although it subsists there, man will not see it and the proof of this is that he has never seen it. And so, where will he find this truth, the object of his desires? He'll find it in the one who said: '*I am the truth. Ego sum veritas*'.¹

Sermon on the Word of God (T.D., vol. 42, pp. 222-223)

¹ Jn 14:6.

June 26 is the national holiday of Madagascar. Let us pray for this country and for all the communities of the Assumption Family present on this island.

June 27

Like the apostles, trust in what we must be

Your experiences will be of little use to you. With the world not about to change overnight, surprises will be with you until the end of time. Nevertheless, I am far from being discouraged. Our Lord who *knew what was in the human heart*¹ died for us. We are not ready to suffer the indignities that he underwent; and since we deserve what happens to us, what we are worth in our own eyes lies really in what we should or what we would want to become, rather than in what we are in reality. However, I must tell you that the 9 religious who will be with us next year in Nîmes are very enthusiastic and eager. The contagion has even infected your husband. I envisage the year about to begin with moral results already achieved and I am filled with a confidence shared by all those around me. With regard to opposition, it is unavoidable and will undoubtedly be quite strong. That's the way it must be. We will be humble; we will be small; we will be joyful like *the apostles who were flogged... And so they left the presence of the Sanhedrin glad to have had the honor of suffering humiliation for the sake of the name*².

Letter to Mrs. Cécile Germer-Durand,

August 25, 1866

(Letters, vol. VI, pp. 154-155)

¹ Jn 2:25.

² Ac 5:41.

Mrs. Cécile Germer-Durand (1818-1886) was the wife of the professor of the Collège in whom Fr. d'Alzon had full confidence but of whom he did not always share his cautious apprehensions or his somber moods. Once she became a widow, she chose religious life with the Oblates and spent some time in Eastern Europe. One of their sons, Joseph, became an Assumptionist.

June 28

Saint Irenaeus of Lyons: Tradition and Scripture

The apostles would go and teach in two ways, by preaching and by writing, – letters which have been preserved with great care. Let us note that they were written for particular situations. They were letters preserved in the Church thanks to a special grace of the Holy Spirit in such a way that if the Holy Spirit did not exist, the letters would have gotten lost or falsified. The Church frequently had to pronounce itself on these letters. But note that the Church would show no less respect for Tradition than for these letters. Why? Because Tradition preceded the letters. Jesus Christ never wrote anything. Several peoples, according to Saint Irenaeus, were Christians and never possessed the Sacred Scripture. Saint Augustine affirms that the man who has faith, hope, and charity has no need of the sacred letters. Therefore, when you say to me, show me such and such a dogma in Holy Scripture, I will answer that it matters little that I show it to you in Sacred Scripture or not, as long as I show it based on an authority greater than Sacred Scripture, because it is by Tradition that I come to know Sacred Scripture.

Notes for an instruction (around 1841),

according to T.D., vol. 50, p. 303 (DO1575)

In Fr. d'Alzon's mind, the study of Sacred Scripture could not be separated from the study of the Fathers of the Church. He often referred to the Fathers to truly understand the Word of God. Throughout his life Fr. d'Alzon constantly sought out whatever was being said or written on the Fathers. He bought the Migne collection as it appeared volume by volume. He wrote that *one had to take precautions against dangerous new trends by possessing a firm grasp of the interpretations that the bishops of the early Church gave to the writings of the Apostles.*

June 29

Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles

After the Ascension, the Lord chose a vicar from among His apostles who received a mandate to govern the Church and exercise primacy of jurisdiction that the bishops of Rome, the successors of St. Peter, would maintain forever and ever.

Let us examine the character of the man chosen by God to fill such a lofty office. Simon, son of John and brother of Andrew, was a simple fisherman from the village of Bethsaida, on the shore of Lake Genesareth. The Gospels paint the character of Simon Peter as rash and

presumptuous, but devoted, loving, and self-forgetful. Everything in him tended toward activity rather than contemplation; the cast of his genius seems to have served as a prototype for the Latin genius. The whole of his character brings together the good qualities of the French character and one could almost describe him with this familiar expression: with him, the heart primes the head... Let us be, like Peter, ready to give ourselves generously, humble in our good works, firm in the affirmation of our faith, and the Lord will shower us with His gifts.

Le Pèlerin, June 29, 1878, p. 418

June 30

Saint Paul

Every day I spend an hour and a half meditating either on the Gospel of Saint John or the Epistles of Saint Paul. Let me say first of all that it takes a lot of effort on my part. I have to force myself to be able to concentrate. I get tired even prior to being able to grasp the initial ideas; but once I am well into my subject, when I sense that I am discovering something, when I am grasping a little more of the truth, I cannot describe for you what immense joy floods all the

faculties of my soul. At that moment, how one loves God! It is no longer as a friend, or a king, or a father; it is as God. It is impossible to experience toward Him what one feels toward anyone else. Again this evening, I was meditating these words of Saint Paul: *Nobis autem revelavit Deus per Spiritum suum; Spiritus enim omnia scrutatur, etiam profunda Dei*¹.

Letter to Henri Gouraud,

November 8, 1830

(Letters, V, A, p. 158)

¹ I Cor 2:10: *"These are the very things that God has revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God"*.

Let us pray for the Democratic Republic of the Congo whose national holiday is celebrated today.